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FEBRUARY

# MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**DEATH BREAKS  
QUARANTINE**

*FEATURE-LENGTH  
MYSTERY NOVEL*

*by* **ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT**



**SATAN SENDS  
HIS MISTRESS**

*MYSTERY-TERROR  
NOVELETTE*

*by* **PAUL ERNST**

**BLOSSINGAME  
GRAVES**



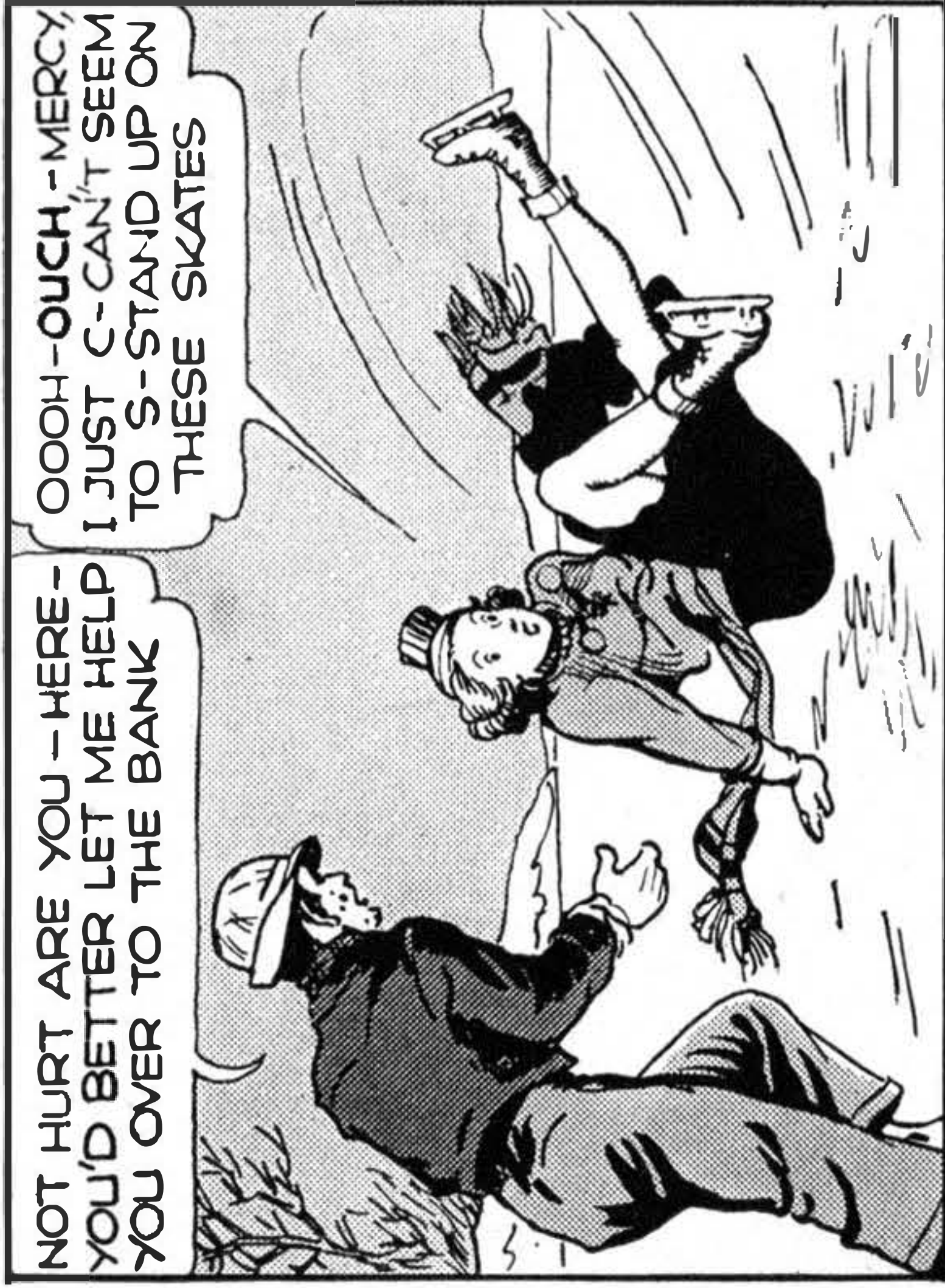
**YOU HAVEN'T  
A CHANCE, SIS  
JIM HATES  
GIRLS!**

**- JIM'S  
PIMPLY  
FACE  
MADE  
HIM  
BALKY  
ABOUT  
GOING  
PLACES  
READ STORY**



THAT GUY'S A REGULAR HERMIT I TELL YOU - JUST STICKS AROUND BY HIMSELF - WOULDN'T TAKE A GIRL OUT ON A BET...

IS THAT SO - WELL I'LL BET I CAN BREAK HIM DOWN. YOU WATCH-



NOT HURT ARE YOU - HERE - YOU'D BETTER LET ME HELP YOU OVER TO THE BANK

OOOH-OUCH - MERCY I JUST C-CAN'T SEEM TO S-STAND UP ON THESE SKATES



THANKS SO MUCH - YOU'RE JIM GREENE AREN'T YOU? I'VE HEARD MY BROTHER BOB TALK ABOUT YOU LOTS. WHY DON'T YOU EVER COME OVER WITH THE REST OF THE CROWD?

OH - I - ER I COULDN'T - THAT IS YOU SEE - I'M - ER - I'M NO GO AT SOCIAL STUFF



WELL, WELL, MISS CLEOPATRA, DIDN'T GET FAR THAT TIME - DID YOU?

H'MM - BOB, I BET I KNOW WHY HE ACTS STAND-OFFISH. IT'S HIS FACE. ALL THOSE PIMPLES. WHY DON'T YOU TELL HIM ABOUT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST? YOU KNOW HOW IT HELPED YOU!



HERE - TRY THIS ONE!

WHO SAID JIM DOESN'T LIKE GIRLS?

O.K. SIS - I'LL EAT MY WORDS. YOU AND THOSE YEAST CAKES SURE HAVE WORKED WONDERS. JIM'S A NEW GUY SINCE THOSE PIMPLES LEFT HIM!

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**MYSTERY**  
**MAGAZINE**

Volume Thirteen

February, 1937

Number Three

**TWO CHILLINGLY REALISTIC NOVELS OF MYSTERY AND TERROR**

**Death Breaks Quarantine.....By Arthur Leo Zagat 8**

*Edith Horne, with happiness in her heart, returned to her home where she had known only peace and love—to face the ghastly mystery of her neighbors' vicious hatred, and the black horror of her father's deadly madness. . . .*

**Dictator of the Damned.....By Wyatt Blassingame 46**

*Alden Case faced a power which reduced a whole city to a shambles—which murdered men, women and bewildered, helpless children with disease and fire and torture. Yet he fought with high courage—until he learned that every move he made brought the girl he loved a step nearer frightful, bloody death!*

**TWO UNFORGETTABLE, NERVE-JOLTING NOVELETTES**

**I Summoned Doctor Death.....By Ralston Shields 88**

*Whether or not that old Negress had given me a sorcerer's power, I knew that I would need more than physical aid—after my wife's nude body was exposed to the avid, lecherous gaze of human beasts in the laboratory of Hell's Physician!*

**Satan Sends His Mistress.....By Paul Ernst 102**

*His chivalry drove Allen Camp to save from that angry, frightened mob the woman they called a witch. Hours later, faced with a peril beyond human understanding, he wished to God he'd let her die!*

**THREE SPINE-TINGLING TERROR TALES**

**The Murder Child.....By Donald Dale 36**

*As the price for her eternal youth, Alicia Morgan found she must bear a demon child!*

**His Avenging Muse.....By Emerson Graves 68**

*Artist Cleve Harrison's new-found genius was brought to him by a seductive being whose body was a thing of breathless beauty—whose heart was black with centuries of sin!*

**Hell's Ghost Ship.....By Leon Byrne 79**

*Though her engines were rusted and broken, the rotting liner slid through black waters, carrying heedless passengers who never guessed that Death was at the helm!*

—AND—

**City of Hell.....The Editor 4**

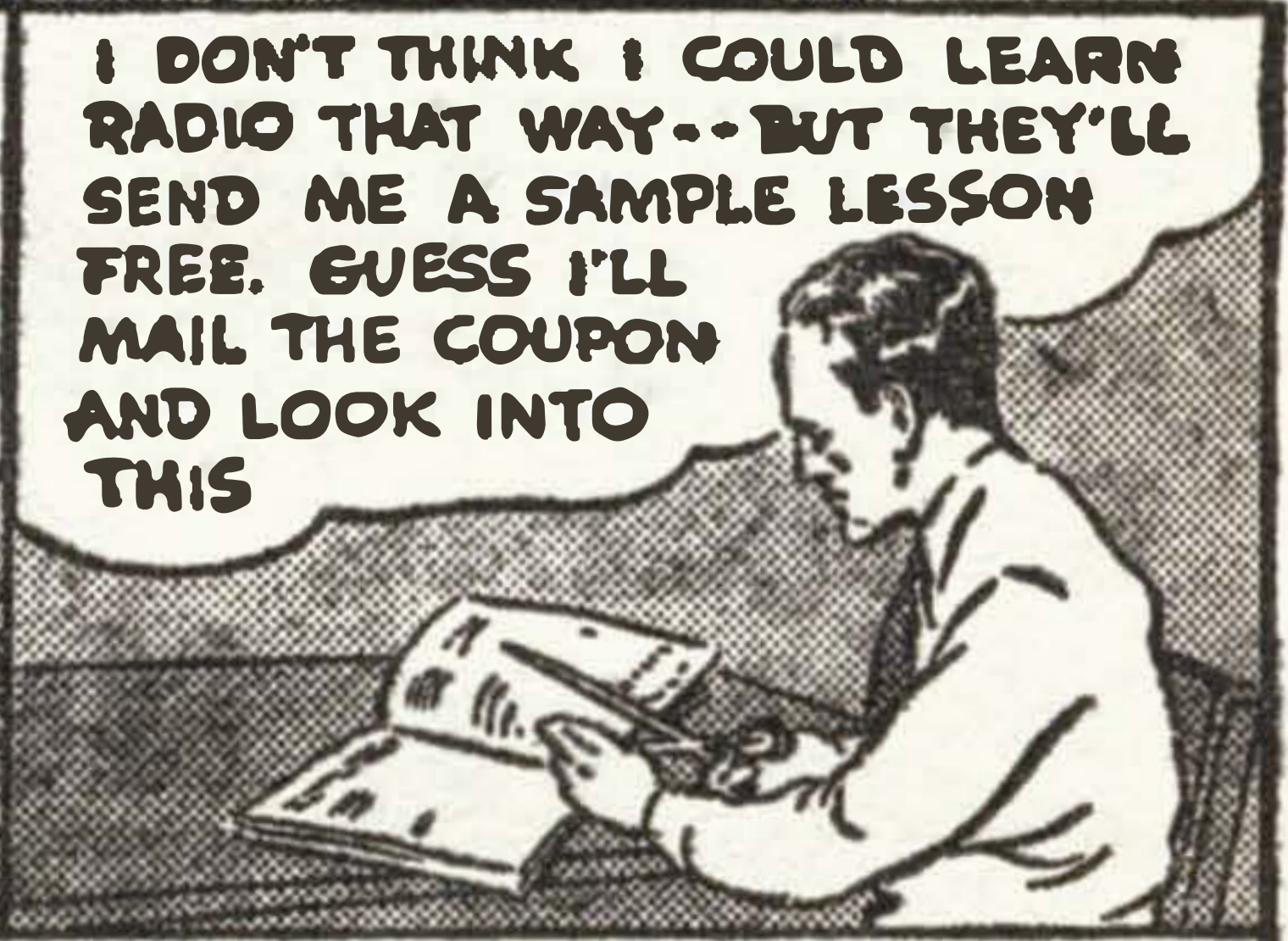
**The River Styx.....A Department 118**

Cover Painting by Tom Lovell

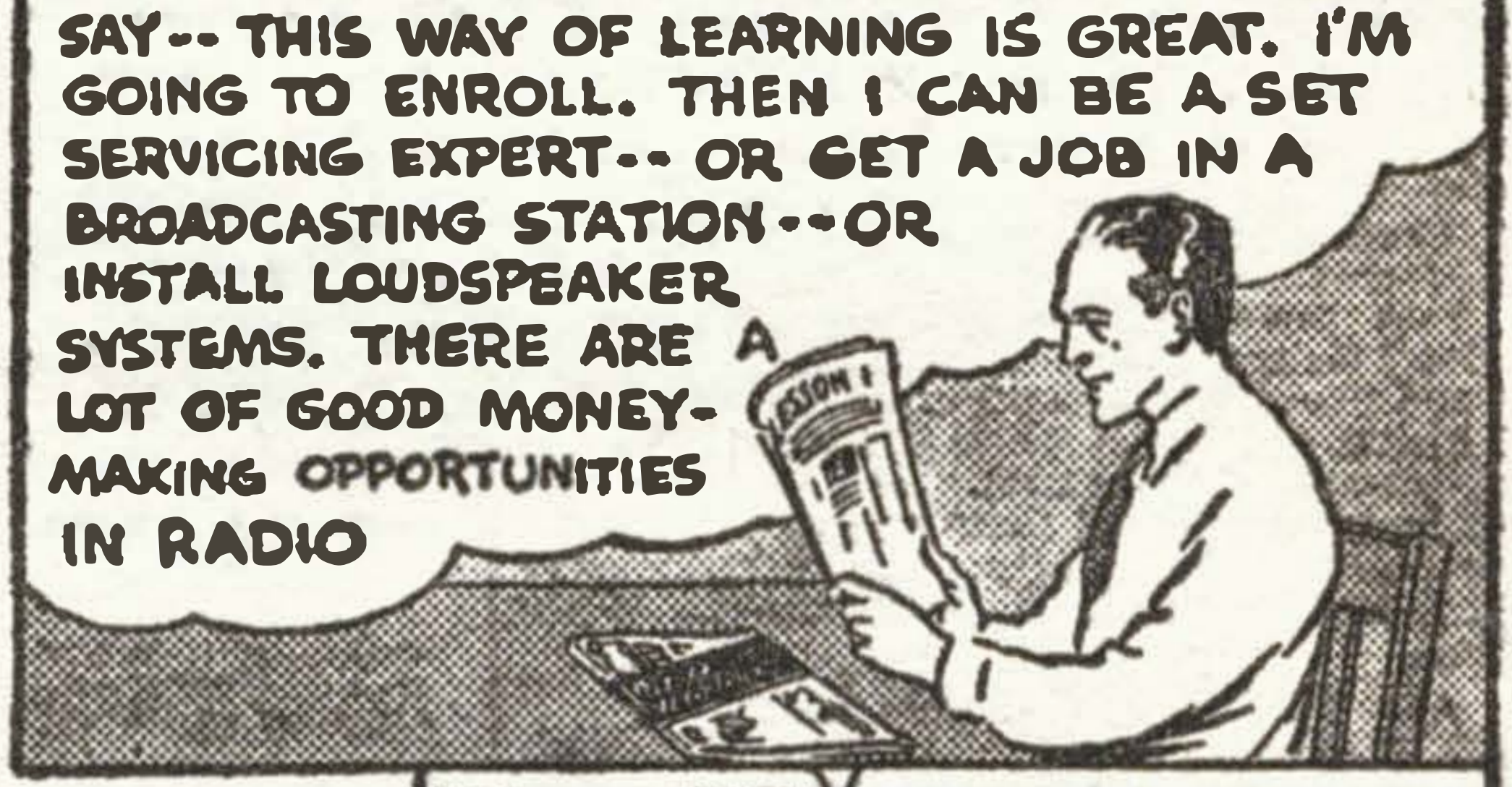
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# City of Hell

THE place I sought was near the little town of Caulille, in eastern Belgium; but although I knew I had reached its general vicinity, I had to admit, at last, that I was lost.

That wasn't the worst of it. My car had run out of gasoline, and night had fallen. The road I had been following—never more than a well-marked cow trail—had disappeared altogether.

I got out of the car and retraced my steps. I had been walking not more than five minutes when suddenly a huge figure raised up in front of me in the darkness.

I came to a sudden halt, a half-stifled gasp catching in my throat.

"Who comes there?" rumbled a heavy voice in native dialect. "What do you want?"

Seemingly the man had been lying down in the road, and had risen like a human foothill across my path; but his questions were natural ones, and I replied, explaining that I had lost my way and was seeking the home of M. Bonnat, who lived near the village of Caulille.

"Yes," said the man, "I know it well. I shall lead you to it!" And without further words he turned about and strode off in the darkness.

I should have been gratified to find a guide who knew the way to my friend's house, but for some reason I wasn't. I sensed something definitely *wrong* with this man—something even vaguely threatening. But after a moment's hesitation, I followed him.

We walked for a long time, over a couple of small hills, through a wood, over tilled fields and fallow pastures, and at last the lights of a small town blinked ahead of us in the darkness. "Is that Caulille?" I asked my guide.

As though my question had startled him, the fellow came to such an abrupt stop that I almost ran against him in the darkness. "Caulille?" he repeated in the tone of one hearing the name for the first time. "*Non!* Yonder is the City of Hell. I live there—I have always lived there. And now you, too, will live there. . . . But you will not live anywhere for long!" And suddenly he clutched my arm.

But I was going to visit no "City of Hell" this night, if I could help it. I gave a sudden wrench, and tried to jerk myself away from my captor. I might as well had tried to escape from a steel bear trap as those stonelike hands of his. I perceived the folly and uselessness of my efforts, and allowed him to half drag me along without further resistance. Surely, I thought, I have fallen in the clutches of a madman—but if he really takes me to the village, someone will come to my help.

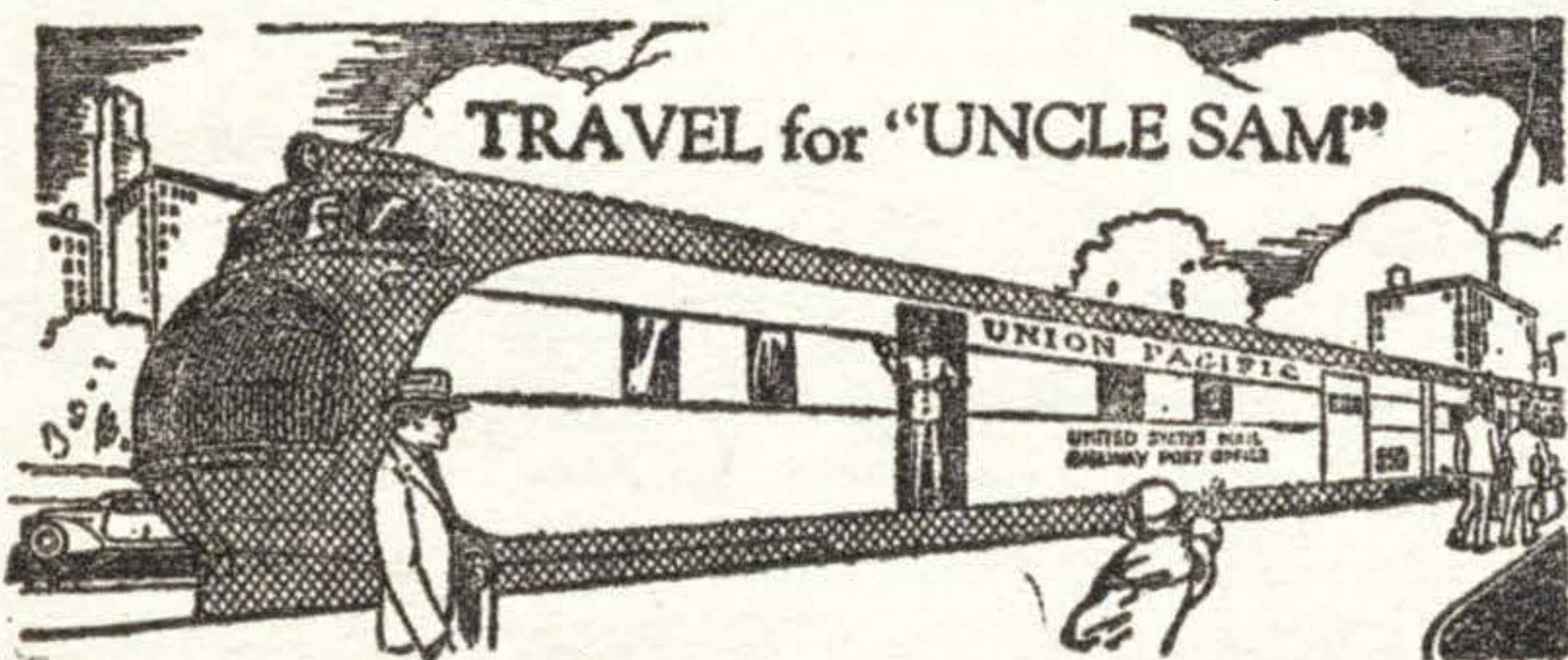
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(Continued from page 4)

But the first person we met on the outskirts of the village was an even more alarm-inspiring person than my captor. He, too, was above average height and weight. He stood straddle-legged in the street, watching our approach.

"Aha!" he cried in a wild, mindless voice, "Another morsel of meat for the cauldrons!" and he grabbed my free arm.

Then began the weirdest experience I ever had in my life. The two giants began fighting over me as if I were a valuable but inanimate prize of some sort. The noise they made aroused the other inhabitants of the village, and in a few seconds we were surrounded by a score of cackling, shouting lunatics, whose horribly distorted faces gave unmistakable evidence of the condition of their minds. I had fallen into the clutches of a village of mad men—that much was clear. But what my fate would be at their hands, once they had decided to whom I belonged, I dared not guess.

My captor was now fighting in deadly earnest with his first adversary, and I was being held by two of the raving, slobbering spectators, when a bull-like bellow rose above the general hub-bub—and drowned it out in an instant. Everyone suddenly became quiet, as a big, brawny individual, with the only sane face I had yet seen in the village, came striding down the street toward us. My assailants turned and slunk off into the darkness like whipped curs, leaving me alone with the newcomer.

"Where did you come from?" were his first words, as he came to a halt in front of me. As quickly and coherently as I could I explained, and then he laughed shortly. "Didn't you ever hear of the lunatic village of Gheel?" he asked; and as I shook my head, he explained.

"For many years," said the man, "we have allowed certain harmless kinds of insane people to live at liberty in this village," he said. "There are a few of us stationed here to watch them, but as a rule they need little supervision. However, strangers are warned to keep away, for they have a tendency to excite the patients—although, even in an excited state, they are harmless. . . ."

But as my rescuer drove me back to the place where my car had been stalled, I wondered just how harmless they would have proved, had he not come along at the time he did. . . .

The town of Gheel, with its population of lunatics in eastern Belgium, represents one of those weird truths, which are always cropping up—truths that are stranger than the eeriest fiction.

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# Death Breaks Quarantine

By Arthur Leo Zagat

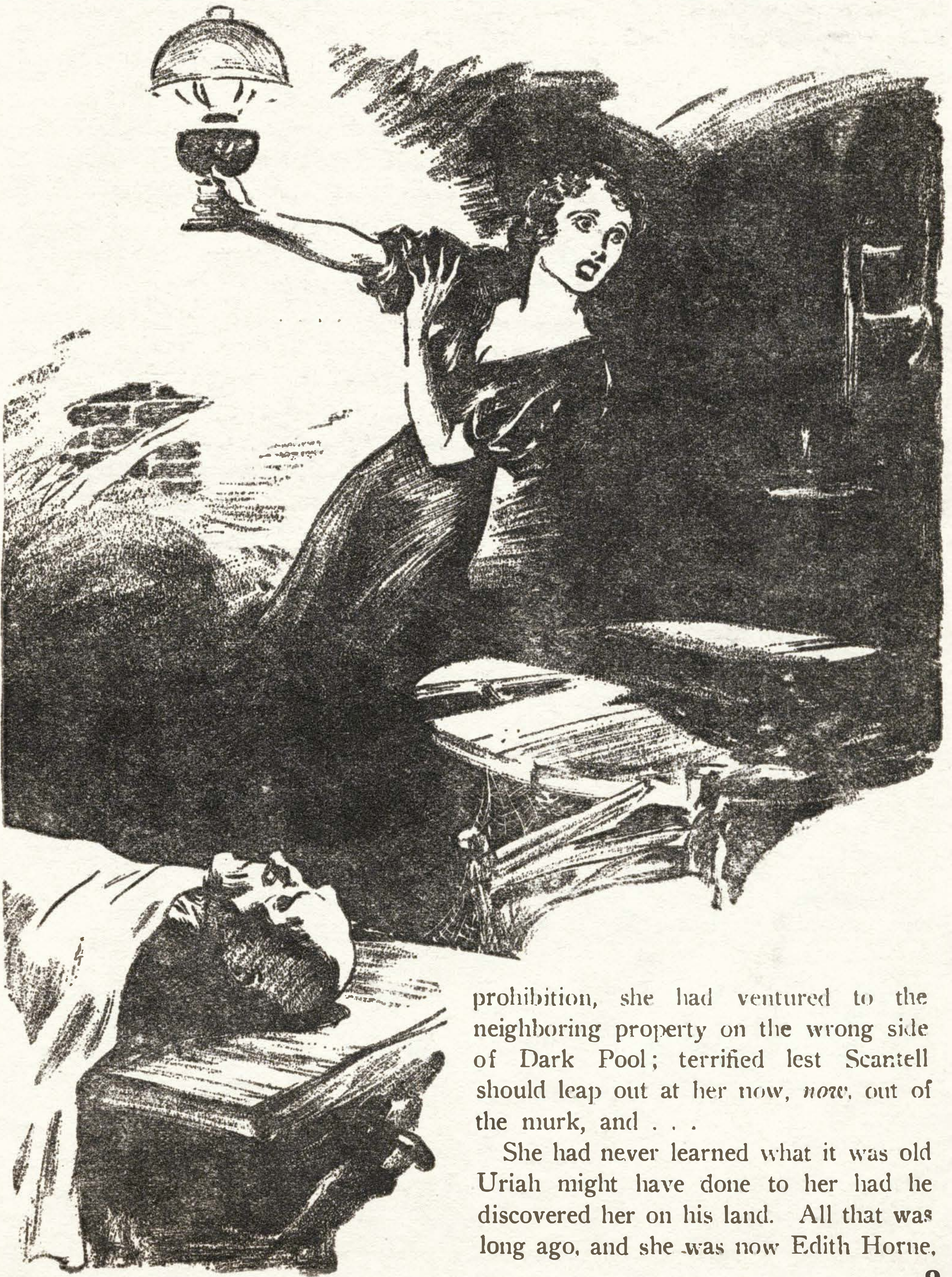
(Author of "Terror Beneath the Streets," etc.)

*Edith Horne returned to the home where she had known only peace and love, to face the ghastly mystery of her neighbors' vicious hatred —and the black horror of her father's deadly madness. . . .*

## A Feature-Length Mystery-Terror Novel of Grim, Uncanny Doom

AS Edith Horne slid furtively through the rank underbrush of Uriah Scantell's abandoned orchard, the old sense of guilt at being on forbidden ground quickened her pulse with a familiar mingling of excitement and quivering apprehension. The eerie

shadows, the gnarled limbs of the ancient trees reaching out for her, the brooding hush, took her momentarily back through the years. Fleeting again she was a little girl with smudged face and yellow pigtails, very much frightened, because against her father's strict



prohibition, she had ventured to the neighboring property on the wrong side of Dark Pool; terrified lest Scantell should leap out at her now, *now*, out of the murk, and . . .

She had never learned what it was old Uriah might have done to her had he discovered her on his land. All that was long ago, and she was now Edith Horne.

R. N.; three hard years of hospital training ended, the coveted diploma hers at last.

Sunlight filtered through the leafy edge of the thick woods. Edith paused to smooth her white frock over the tender curves of a slim form just burgeoning into womanhood, and adjust the misty glory of her hair with fluttering, birdlike touches of her deft hands. The freckles of that long-ago tomboy were piquant, faint tracings now on the downy velvet of her skin, and the turbulent tempestuousness of her eyes had become a calm, deep blue. But her little nose was still saucily tip-tilted, and her red mouth still quirked with the impish mischief that had inspired her notion of surprising her father with her return.

To make sure the village gossips would not see her and 'phone the news of her arrival to Jeremiah Horne, Edith had slipped off the train on the side away from Wellton's little depot; had darted into the bushes and made her way backlots to the wheatfield just ahead, where she knew Dad would certainly be on this late fall afternoon.

She had such glorious news to tell him. News that was still a secret between herself and—Harry.

"My Harry," the girl whispered, her eyes aglow. It was still incredible that Dr. Harold Gorton loved her. The idol of Midwest City Hospital, he was the medical board's pride because of the fame to which he had attained despite his youth; the adored of the nursing staff because of his youth, his tall, lithe body, his grave, handsome countenance and his unfailing consideration and courtesy.

No. Edith could not yet believe that he *was* her Harry, her sweetheart, her husband-to-be.

It would become real only when she had told Dad about it, and had seen his leathery, weatherbeaten countenance

alight with joy in her happiness. She knew just what he would say.

"I am glad, Edie, glad." Then the light would die out of his keen old eyes. They would grow strangely somber. "Let us thank God," he would whisper, kneeling on the stubble of the cut wheat, "and pray that He will not ask too great a price for this joy."

Edith had never dared ask why he always said that, just as she had never dared ask why he so hated Uriah Scantell, his nearest neighbor. The two circumstances seemed somehow tied together, and somehow tied to the death of the mother she could not remember. And the roots of it all were buried in the dim past . . . .

Her hasty toilet was finished. She took the few more steps that brought her to the orchard's boundary, pushed through the final bit of brush.

The landscape drowsed in the heat of the setting sun. From beneath the girl's feet a grassy slope rolled gently down to the green-scummed surface of Dark Pond, whose nearer edge was the boundary of the Horne farm. Beyond it a languorous breeze whispered in tall, ripe wheat.

Edith froze. The wheat shouldn't be still standing like that, a rippling golden lake. It should be cut and sheaved, and Dad should be working down the long rows of shocks, pitchforking the bundles of grain into the wagon that Elmer Barnes, his hired hand, would drive off to the threshing.

Neither Jeremiah Horne nor Elmer were there. They were nowhere in sight. Edith could see the tall barn beyond the fields and a corner of its yard. The gate rails in the barnyard fence were down. A spade lay on the ground, as meticulous Jeremiah would never have left it.

It was wrong, all wrong.

Edith was running, suddenly; appre-

hension, dread, tightening her throat. Dad must be ill, dreadfully ill. She had not had a letter from him in over a month. She had thought him too busy with the harvest to write.

She skirted the edge of the desolate pool that had neither visible inlet nor outlet. An iridescent, rainbow film shimmered over Dark Pond's surface, and its slimy decay was an oily stench in her nostrils. A canvas tube snaked out and crawled to a gasoline-driven pump rusting nearby. Dad, then, had at last gotten around to draining the pond. But the pump was idle.

Now she was running through the wheat field that should have been a field of short stubble. The sunlight was a flood of hot brightness beating about her and the country-bred girl saw, even in her breathless haste, that the grain was not ripe but overripe. Her last lingering hope died that the season might be late, the wheat not quite ready for reaping.

The sere stalks broke crisply as she thrust through them. Crackling barbs caught at the light stuff of her dress as if a million tiny hands were striving to hold her back. The lush black loam of the fertile bottom land clogged her trim, high-heeled shoes that were meant for the city's sidewalks . . . .

She ran through the gap in the barnyard fence, flew past the tall, grey silo tower that had hidden the farmhouse from her.

"Dad," Edith called. "Dad! Where . . . ."

The cry died in her throat, fading to a whimper. She was no longer running. She was standing stock-still in the old familiar barnyard. She was staring at the rambling, low building that was familiar as only one's birthplace can be—yet was suddenly eerie with a brooding, ominous strangeness.

One hand lay, pallid and cold, on her heaving breast, the other was flung, palm

outward, against her trembling lips. Her eyes strained unnaturally wide, their pupils great wells of dark foreboding.

The roof's mossy shingles, the weather-stained fieldstone walls of her home, baked in the heat and the glare. But every window Edith could see was tight-shut, its black shade pulled tight down to cover it. It was as if the house had shut its eyes on terror—or as if it hid some dreadful secret within it from the sun's prying gaze.

"Dad," Edith moaned. "Oh, Dad." There could be only one reason for the drawn blinds, for the thick silence that folded over field and barnyard and house. Her father was dead . . . . Why hadn't they let her know? Why hadn't Doctor Rawlins, Welcome Valley's beloved physician, wired her?

She didn't realize that she had moved until her hand was on the knob of the backdoor, tugging at it. The portal did not yield. It was locked. It was bolted from the inside.

There was no sound from behind the door. No sound at all. That wasn't reasonable! No matter how suddenly death had struck, no matter how short a time ago, the neighbor women should be within, preparing the house for the funeral. The village men should be there, in unaccustomed black coats and neck-chafing collars, extolling the virtues of the departed in hushed, rumbling voices. There should be life in the house, the hushed murmur of life in the presence of death.

Instead there was the empty, awful silence of a sepulcher.

Abruptly Edith was aware that she was not alone. The fearful certainty that someone was watching her, that some hostile gaze was upon her, slid into her consciousness. She was—afraid!

She turned, slowly, fearfully. No one was in the barnyard, in the slice of wheat lot beyond it. Then she saw him—a

sharply outlined figure against the sky, at the crest of the ridge beyond which was Scantell's homestead. He ducked out of sight in the instant she glimpsed him. Edith retained an eerie impression of the vanished shape. It had seemed weirdly distorted, not quite human . . . .

The girl shuddered, icy with terror of the unknown. . . .

This was nonsense, she berated herself, her small fist clenching. The wind had swayed a distorted bush up there, and it had swung back. . . . She must get into the house, must find out what had happened to Dad.

**T**HIS door was bolted from the inside, but although she had cached her suitcase in the bushes near the railroad, she had the key to the front entrance in the square little kitbag hanging from the crook of her arm. She started around.

The great double window in the narrow south end of the house was as blind as the others. The front lawn was unkept, uncared for. A high row of close-planted hemlocks hid the road. But the sense of isolation the dark hedge conveyed was broken by tall, drab poles that stalked away down the valley with their burden of telephone and electric wires, tying the Horne farm to Wellton.

Their reminder that she was not utterly cut off from her kind gave Edith courage to mount the porch steps and fit her key into its slot. The lock clicked under her twisting fingers. The door swung open, thudded shut and locked itself behind her. Dad had been so proud of that spring lock, the only one in the valley . . . .

A strange grey twilight, little better than darkness, brooded in the big sitting room the girl entered. Remembered furnishings were vague, menacing bulks in that eerie gloom. The low, raftered ceiling hung over her with a ponderable, tangible oppression. Closed in by thick stone,

sunless for an unknown length of time, the atmosphere was heavy, dank with a damp chill.

But it was a smell that brought back all Edith's foreboding, that multiplied it tenfold, so that fear penetrated to the very marrow of her bones. The air was saturated with it, crawling with it. It was an acrid, stale foulness such as a fungus gives off, yet its staleness was not that of a fungus. It had some quality in it of a cadaver's putrescence, yet it was not the odor of the unburied dead. It was a stench beyond experience, beyond analysis. It was the very essence of horror.

"*Edie!*"

Edith wheeled, startled by her father's voice.

"Edie."

It came from the point where she knew a sofa stood against the further wall, and it was a hoarse croak shot through with suffering. "How—how did you get here? Didn't—they see you?"

The girl took a step further into the room. "No one saw me . . . . But you're sick. You—"

"Then get out. Before anyone knows you've been here. *Get out!*"

He was ill, delirious. God! And left alone here to die!"

"Of course not." Edith forced a laugh. "I'm staying here to take care of you." Her fingers closed on a shade cord. "Let me look at you." The blind rattled up. Light blazed in . . . .

Jeremiah Horne screamed, the sound shrill and unhuman with unendurable agony. He leaped from his cocoon of grey blankets . . . .

The *thing* that scuttered toward her was not her father! Couldn't be! It was contorted, misshapen. It thrust her aside, fell against the window sill. Twisted, grotesque talons snatched at the shade edge, ripped the blind down. But in the frenzied instant before the sun was again barred out, every detail of the shrieking

creature had burned itself into Edith's retina.

Horror throttled her, so that her scream was only a toneless rasp in her throat.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Unseen Prowler

**J**EREMIAH HORNE crumpled, as the shade blotted out light. Pain's fierce strength that had lifted him from his pallet and flung him across the room was gone, and he was a sodden heap on the floor. Only his tortured hands moved, clawing over his eyes while his scream faded into a slobbering moan.

Edith Horne was just as motionless, the connections between her shocked brain and her quivering muscles jangled and broken. She stared at the whimpering mound at her feet out of eyes wide-pupilled and livid with horror.

The nurse was no stranger to broken bodies, to bodies swollen with dropsy, emaciated by fever, riddled with cancer. For three years she had ministered to them. She had schooled herself to callousness at sights that would turn the layman sick with revulsion. But here, in her own home, in the person of her own father, was something beyond her experience. It was a phantasm out of the half-world of nightmare, out of the delirium of madness.

It was barely discernible now in the restored dimness, but she had seen it with awful clearness against the light. It was a weazened travesty of a human form, every bone awry, every joint a swollen knob. Dingy pajamas had fallen down along a contorted arm, had flapped open on a rib-corrugated torso, exposing skin that was like no human covering but an integument of fishlike scales; dark brown and crusted, except where here and there it had sloughed away to expose weals of raw flesh.

The face had been most hideous of all. Out of the stiff grey-black hairs bristling on the sunken-cheeked, tortured visage, impossible great eyes had bulged from between granulated, hairless lids; eyes that were scarlet, blood-engorged balls pricked by the pin-points of too-tiny pupils. It . . . .

"Eddie!" That her father's voice should come from that horrible caricature of a body was somehow incredible. "Did I touch you?" It was a husky croak. "Did I . . . .?"

"I—I don't know." The shuddering girl was amazed that she could manage speech. "I don't—know."

It must be her father who lay there. It *was* her father. Not only the familiar voice, but a vibration deep within her of filial instinct, of that love which can not be deceived by any disguise, told her that. Pity welled up in her grief, vanquishing the revulsion that was still a sick quaver in her veins.

"It was the light," he moaned. "Stabbing my eyes with such awful pain. I didn't know what I was doing." A sob choked him, then he was continuing, more calmly, more reasonably. "But you are not sure whether I touched you. Maybe I didn't. Maybe you're safe yet. Go, Edie, at once. Go the way you came. And tell—no one—you have been here."

"Go?" The paralysis that had held her was gone. "And leave you alone?" She knelt to the worn rug, to the contorted figure that lay on it. "Do you really think I would, Dad?" Her arms reached out.

His grotesque hands battered feebly at them. "Don't touch me! Don't. You'll catch it!"

Edith had his head in her lap. Her arms were around him. "No I won't, Dad. I'm a nurse. I've taken care of people with the most terrible diseases, and I've never caught them. I know how to protect myself. And—" her tone was a low soothing

croon—"and I know how to take care of you. Everything's going to be all right. Everything."

And at that moment someone laughed!

**E**DITH'S head jerked up. There was no one in the room. Nothing moved. But that low, mocking laugh had been distinct. It had come—but that was impossible—out of the wall to her left. Out of the wall she knew to be solid stone, feet thick!

She thought, perhaps, her father hadn't heard it. She went on murmuring to him as though nothing had happened. "Your Edie's here to take care of you, and you'll be better soon." She had not imagined that laugh. She had heard it. Fear breathed its icy breath on the nape of her neck, but there was no quiver of fear in her soft voice. "You'll be better. . . ."

"Oww . . . ." The cry from Horne's cracked lips stopped her; it was an animal howl of the purest anguish. Tiny muscles knotted with agony under brown scales that made his face a mask of horror, and he writhed in a paroxysm of fierce torture. "Owww . . . ."

Edith's teeth sank into her under lip as she suffered with the man who had been father and mother both to her through the long years. Horne's fingers curled, clutching empty air—clutching the small bag that was somehow still on her arm.

The bag—! It was a graduation present from Harry—there was a hypodermic syringe in it, ampuls of emergency drugs in solution. Of morphine. . . . She could give Dad relief! Thank God, she could give him relief from the pain that was driving him mad.

She had to slide him from her lap to get free. Then swiftly, dextrously, she had the needle adjusted to the glass barrel of the syringe, had it filled with the blessed anodyne.

It took all her strength to hold his flailing arm still while the gleaming steel point slid into a vein. She pressed the plunger home . . . . And in a few minutes—an amazingly few—he was asleep.

He would sleep for hours now. At least she had been able to do that for him . . . .

She must get him to his bed. He was light, as she lifted him. Pathetically light. He was a mere shell of his former self, burned out. Realizing it, the girl knew that it was only her father's indomitable will that had kept him alive.

There was a glass of water alongside the sofa where he had been lying, and on the seat of a chair within reach a strip of dried beef, gnawed at one end as a rat might have gnawed it. Depositing her burden on the makeshift bed, Edith understood why Jeremiah was lying here and not in his room upstairs. He had grown too weak to negotiate the stairs. From here he could crawl into the kitchen when hunger and thirst had become too great. There was a faucet in there, the water that ran from it piped from a spring far up the hill behind Dark Pond. There were shelves filled with jars of meat and preserved vegetables prepared each fall for the ensuing year.

He could not blindfold his eyes against the light that agonized them so. He had to be able to see, if only a little, on his painful expeditions for the necessities of the life to which he clung. That was why he had drawn the shades.

How was it he had been left alone here so long? That was not the way of Welcome Valley. They were good neighbors, here helping one another. Even if he had been stricken unawares, there had been the telephone in the hall outside by which he could have summoned aid. There had been Elmer Barnes. . . .

Where was Elmer? What had become of him? Why hadn't he . . . ?"

Something rolled out of the blankets



Edith was straightening, and thumped on the floor. She bent down to it, automatically. Then there was nothing automatic about her gasp, her wide-eyed stare at the thing that was cold to her fingers.

It was a revolver. It was Dad's revolver. He was keeping it here, close by his side, ready for instant use. Why? Against what possible enemy?

A footfall thudded, close behind her! Edith whirled, the gun jerking up . . . .

The room was empty. It was starkly, staringly empty. But fabric slithered, nearby, against some rough surface . . . !

Edith's scalp tightened, the brooding ominous silence closing in about her. There was no one in the house. She was alone in it with the pitiful sufferer who was the father she loved. *But she was not alone!* The certainty that someone, some *thing*, else inhabited the wan gloom that pulsed about her with the throb, throb of her own terrified pulse, was a creeping shudder in her veins, a chill wind breathing on her hot skin. Fear dwelt here, invisible, intangible, but a menace appallingly real.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Isolated

**E**DIITH HORNE had, after all, been trained in the hard, cold reality of science. She had learned how investiga-

tion and logic had demolished one superstition after another: the myth of spirit-possession, the tradition of bleeding evil humors from a diseased body—and her own childish belief that warts were acquired by handling toads, and that killing a toad would do away with them.

This training came to her rescue now. There must be, she reasoned, some quite natural explanation for what she had heard. The laugh. The footfall.

Of course! Her mouth twisted with exasperation at her hysteria. The sounds could not have come from within the house. They must, then, have come from the porch outside those windows across the sitting room.

Edith's eyes narrowed. The black blinds lay close against the sashes, and no light seeped in. The prowler could not possibly see her. But perhaps he was listening.

"All right, Dad," she said aloud. "I'll get you some fresh water from the kitchen." She walked deliberately to the end of the couch, to the door in the wall behind it. Her heels clicked on wood where the carpet ended. She opened the door. let it slam shut . . . .

Then she whirled to dart silently to a window. Her fingers closed on the edge of its shade. Slowly, cautiously, she lifted it an inch away from the pane, peered out, the gun ready in her hand.



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After the gloom of the house the glare hurt her eyes. Edith blinked, could see more clearly though the dull pain remained. Her forefinger tightened on the trigger about which it was curled.

The porch was empty. There was no one on the shaggy lawn. But a branch moved, down there in the hemlock hedge, *against* the wind!

The girl thought she could make out a deeper shadow low in the shadow of the hedge, as though something crouched there within the foliage. She pulled the shade a little wider, held it open with her shoulder, tugged at the window. She was going to lift her gun and shoot into the hemlocks. That was how far she had come already along the road of terror. She was going to kill the one who was watching Jeremiah Horne's agony, who was waiting for him to die.

The sash didn't budge. The girl glanced up, searching with her burning eyes for the reason. She found it. The window was nailed shut!

That, more than all that had gone before, pounded into Edith's brain realization of her father's situation. They had left him here, his friends, his neighbors of Welcome Valley, to die. To keep, sick as he was, a solitary, sleepless vigil against some furtive, inimical skulker.

Something else beat against her mind, something she had glimpsed in the kitchen as she had opened its door. In her anxiety to get to the window and trap the prowler, it had not penetrated, but now she remembered it, and it was an added horror to those that closed in on her.

The food shelves on the rear wall of the kitchen had been empty; Absolutely empty. There was nothing to eat in the house, except that one piece of dried beef on which Dad had gnawed!

Why had they left him like this? It was not like them. It was certainly not like Doc Rawlins. Perhaps he didn't know...

Edith let the shade drop again, glanced at the sleeping Jeremiah, ran out through a curtained doorway to the hall where the telephone was. She twirled the magneto handle viciously, snatched the receiver from its hook and jammed it against her ear.

"Number, please."

"Ring two-three." She knew her voice was husky, unrecognizable. She was glad of it. The operator was Martha Salant and if Martha knew who she was there would have been questions to answer. Even in school, she had been an insatiably curious little tyke.

The receiver clicked. Clicked again. That always happened when Doc Rawlins' number was rung. There was only one line through Welcome Valley, and everyone on it was lifting his receiver to listen in, anxious to know who was sick, what was the matter with them . . . .

"Rawlins speaking. Who is it?"

"Edith Horne, Doctor. I . . . ."

"Edith!" The physician's interjection was a shout of surprise. "Where are you?"

"Home. But listen . . . ."

"How on earth did you get there? Didn't anyone see you?" Those had been the first words out of her father's mouth too! What . . . .?

"I just got here, Doctor. I found Dad . . . ."

"I know," he broke in, as though he wanted to cut her short, as though he didn't want the eavedroppers to hear any more. "I'll be right over. If they'll let me get through again."

"If they—Who? Who would stop you? Why?"

"*You'll find out!*" But that wasn't Dr. Rawlins' voice. Or was it Rawlin's voice changed, gruff suddenly, thick with threat?

"Doctor!" No answer. "*Doctor.*" Had

he hung up? "*Doctor Rawlins, why don't you answer me?*"

A laugh . . . . But it wasn't Dr. Rawlins who laughed. There was the same mocking, triumphant tone in that laugh as there had been in the one that had seemed to come out of the very walls of the old house.

"Who was that? Who was that laughing?"

No answer. Utterly no answer. Nothing but enigmatic clicks as the listeners cut off.

**E**DITH hung her own receiver up with nerveless fingers. Her hand stayed on the cold rubber as though to keep her in touch with reality. Her aching brow crinkled as she fought to get her whirling thoughts into some kind of order.

First, both Dad and the old doctor had seemed astonished that she had gotten here at all. That meant that if she had been spied getting off the train she would have been stopped.

Second, her father had twice ordered her away, had ordered her not to let anyone know she had been here. Even in the agony he had suffered from the light, he had demanded to know whether he had touched her. The disease, whatever it was, must be terribly contagious . . . .

That was it! The house was quarantined. No one had dared enter it, even to nurse Dad. That accounted for his being alone. It accounted for his surprising reception of her, and for the two men's surprise at her presence. But it did not account for the gun. It did not account for the unseen watcher, for the voice and the laugh on the 'phone.

Nor for Dr. Rawlins' doubt whether he would be permitted to visit his patient again . . . .

*Again!* That meant he had already been here. That he had been treating Dad. But the old man was no better. The ill-

ness was beyond the country physician's skill. It was folly to expect him to know what to do for it. Edith had seen nothing like it in the hospital . . . .

The hospital! If she could only get her father there. If only Harry could see him. Harry would know what to do. Harry . . . .

What a fool she was! Harry was her lover. Midwest City was only a three hours' auto trip away . . . .

Edith Horne was twirling the magneto handle again. "Martha," she gasped. "This is Edith. Get me long distance quickly. Midwest 4386. Hurry!"

"Edith," Martha's tone was queer, "I can't get you that number. I cannot take any out-of-town calls from your 'phone."

"You—you—" Edith Horne couldn't talk, couldn't force coherent words out of her clamped throat. "What? What did you say?"

"I am not permitted to connect you with any out-of-town number." The operator took refuge in the metallic, expressionless accents of her vocation. Then her voice broke. "Oh Edith. I'm sorry. Terribly . . . ."

"Why? What's going on here? What . . . ?"

"I can't tell you. I *don't dare* . . . ."

"Martha!" The fear she had sensed in the house wasn't confined to it. It reached out over the countryside. It was reflected in the sharp thinning of Martha Salant's voice, in its tremble. "Listen to me, Martha. You must listen to me. My father's terribly ill. He's dying. I'm calling a doctor for him, a specialist who can save him if anyone in the world can. You can't be so cruel, nobody can be so cruel, as not to let me . . . ."

"I'm not permitted to . . . ."

"Stop!" The distracted girl clung to the box, her fingers opening, closing, opening on its wooden surface as though somehow they could mould it into compliance,

"Stop saying that like a parrot. Like a— a soulless machine. You aren't a machine. You're the little girl who sat alongside of me in school. You're Martha Salant and I'm Edith Horne and we grew up together. We used to share boy friends. We used to hide from the boys because we liked being alone together better than anything. You cried when I went away to train and you made me swear that I would never forget you. You can't do this to me. You can't, Martha! You've got to help me!"

"I—I can't . . ." the voice in the 'phone sobbed. "I can't refuse you. I'll take the chance. But I can't connect you direct. That would be noticed. Give me your message and I'll repeat it to your doctor." There was terror in that voice, but now there was courage too. Edith was soon to learn how great a courage. "Hurry."

"God bless you! Listen. Midwest 4386 is Dr. Harold Gorton. Ask for him in person. Tell him Edith, his Edith, needs him desperately. Tell him to drive here and to bring both his bags, surgical and medical. Tell him to come quickly."

"I've got it, Edith. I'll watch my chance to make the call."

"Call me back and tell me as soon as you have. I . . ."

The line was dead. Martha had gasped, just before it went dead, as though she had seen someone coming. But she would do what she promised. Edith knew her, and she knew she could rely on that.

**T**HERE was nothing to do now but wait for Martha's call back that the message had been delivered. Nothing to do but wait, and wonder why the quarantine extended even to the telephone; to cower under the pall of dread that weltered in the darkened house and wondered what Jeremiah Horne had done to deserve the curse that had been laid upon him . . .

*Nothing* to do! Edith shook her head, abruptly. Why, there was everything to do. Her father lay in those frowsy blankets, the dirt of weeks, caked on him. She was a nurse, and she thought she had nothing to do!

She must clean him up, bathe him, while he was still under the influence of the narcotic she had administered. First she would fetch clean sheets, clean blankets, from the closet in his room above.

The girl started for the stairs that rose out of the hall's obscurity, twisting from a landing and then going through the ceiling so that she could not see what was at their upper end. She went up slowly, while little, uncontrollable quivers ran through her. She was tired, inexplicably tired, so that climbing these steps she was accustomed effortlessly to run up. was a tremendous task. A dull ache throbbed, throbbed in her skull.

She reached the landing, turned. An oblong of light lay vertically against the wall above; angling in, Edith knew, from a skylight in the unwindowed upper hall. It was not very bright, but it stabbed her eyes with sudden pain.

She halted, shutting her lids against the discomfort. Apprehension twisted in her breast. Even though she had been in the dusk below for an hour or more, the light should not have had so great an effect. Could it be that she had become—infected? She pushed the grisly thought out of her mind, remembering the scare a pimple had given her a few days after she had tended her first scarlet fever case.

If she started to look for symptoms that she had caught her father's illness she'd soon get herself into a state where she'd be useless, unable to help him. And he needed her help so terribly.

She forced herself to open her eyes, to look directly at the radiant rectangle. Relief sighed from her lips. They didn't

hurt any longer. She started up again . . . .

A shadow flitted across the oblong of light! The same grotesquely contorted silhouette she had glimpsed on the ridge above Dark Pond!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Doom Patrol

**A**NGER exploded within Edith Horne, rage at all the inexplicable, menacing experiences the past hour had brought her. It took control of her, hurled her up the few remaining steps. Her heels thumped on the upper landing. She twisted . . . .

The square hall was vacant! There was no one in it, and the dust on the uncarpeted floor was unmarked. The two doors giving on it were tightly closed.

Edith snatched at the knob of the one directly ahead of her, jerked it open. The hinges creaked with disuse, and the room behind it was empty as the hall had been. It was her own room. Nothing was disturbed. The little bed with its neat pink spread, the dresser, the washstand, were just as she had left it.

The other then. Her father's. Still in the grip of the wrath that had vanquished fear, the girl swung around, darted across the hall went into the slant-ceiled chamber where for years Jeremiah Horne had slept alone in the big, four-poster bed where she had been born.

This, too, was unoccupied. The mattress on the bed was naked. There were successive circles of dirt in the washbowl left by water that had dried. Dad's desk in the corner was cluttered with the papers and the small gadgets of his farm business, and over all lay a thick layer of dust. But no one was in it, there was no evidence of anyone's having been in it since he had dragged the clothing from the bed, and dragged himself downstairs to his long vigil with pain and terror.

No one in the hall, no one in the only two rooms up here! What then had made the shadow . . .? Had she really seen it? Had not her fevered imagination, wrought up by her father's condition, evoked the laugh and the footfall out of the creakings of the ancient timbers, the settling of the house's ancient stones? The shadow might have been that of a cloud, drifting between the sun and the hall skylight.

There wasn't anyone in the house. There couldn't be. The doors were locked, the windows nailed shut. . . . Was she sure? Perhaps Dad hadn't fastened those up here.

Edith got moving again. She reached the window, jerked up its blind. Yes. There were the nail-heads, the deep dents the hammer had made in the old wood of the sash. No one could have come in through this window or left by it. If there was anyone else in the house beside the Hornes, father and daughter, it was a bodiless phantom, a wraith to whose passage solid stone, solid wood, were no barrier.

The girl tried to shrug away that suggestion, but it remained, an unacknowledged chill tingled at the back of her brain of which she could not quite rid herself.

From up here she could see a small strip of the road beyond the hedge. She watched it for a minute, hoping that perhaps the nose of Dr. Rawlins' rattletrap coupé would poke into view, his premonition of trouble reaching here proven groundless. The longing for him, for any human companionship, rose bitter in her throat.

Quite suddenly all color drained out of the scene. A grey pall seethed along the road, making its soundless solitude more dreary still. Edith was momentarily startled, forgetting how quickly dusk was accustomed to take possession of

Welcome Valley as the sun dipped below its western hill.

A figure appeared from around the curve where the highway passed out of sight to her left. It paced slowly toward the Horne house's gate. It was at first a vague wraith, its outlines indistinguishable. Then a vagrant light beam glinted on metal, and the girl discerned a long-barrelled rifle, slanted across a burly, mackinawed shoulder.

The pedestrian came nearer, moving with a strange, purposeful deliberation. The girl's forehead whitened against the pane and her eyes ached, straining to make him out.

**H**E was Jed Faston! Edith's breath whispered relief, hissing past her white teeth. The unrealized apprehension that had pent it faded. Jed was a classmate of hers. He lived down near Well-ton, his folks' homestead bordering on the Salants' little farm whose white house served as the Valley's telephone exchange. He was in fact, Martha's beau. He could not, then, intend any harm to the Hornes. He was merely returning from a rabbit hunt in the woods.

But he was walking too slowly for that. His booted feet thumped—right, left, right, left—as if he were a sentry on patrol.

A sense of other movement pulled Edith's gaze away from him. She peered to the right. Another form advanced along the road, from the direction of the village. This one, too, carried a gun across his shoulder, but he was taller, somehow gaunter than Faston. It was Uriah Scantell—the old grouch who had been the bugaboo of her childhood—his hatless white hair gleaming palely in the deepening dimness, his lank stature bowed under the weight of his toilsome years.

There was something ominous in the slow pacing of those two out there. Some

dreadful quality of implacable determination. Of grim threat.

They met at the gate. Scantell said something to Jed, and the youth stiffened. Edith could see his face clearly now, and she saw a muscle twitch in its bronzed cheek, saw the openings between his eyelids narrow till they were tight slits. The blunt jaw hardened.

Jed whirled abruptly. His free hand fisted, lifting to shake at the house. His countenance was a marble mask of savage hate. He lurched at the gate, thrusting it open.

The revolver butt ground into Edith's palm. There was no mistaking the fellow's intention. Uriah had said something to the youth that was sending him to attack her father. To finish him! Her pistol jerked up. Jed wouldn't reach the house! Not if she still remembered how to shoot straight. . . .

Scantell's bony fingers clutched Jed's arm, dragged him back into the road. The older man's fleshless lips moved, and the other's visage went quiveringly white. His hand went to his eyes in a gesture of horror.

That instinctive movement told the watching girl what argument Uriah had used to halt the youth's impetuous purpose. The plague that ravaged Jeremiah Horne was paradoxically his safeguard. They hated him, but they dared not come within reach of him to wreak their hate upon him.

Why? What had her father done to the people of Welcome Valley, that they should fling an armed cordon about him to keep him in, to keep help from reaching him until a more terrible death than any they could inflict should take him?

Scantell was speaking earnestly with Faston. Jed nodded, once, wheeled, retraced, stiff-legged the route of his sentry-go that was a relentless death watch.

Thud, thud, thud—Edith could almost hear the pound of his heavy soles as little jets of dust spurted from the road beneath them. They beat like blows of a padded hammer on her skull.

Uriah didn't move. He stood stiffly in the gathering gloom, watching Jed Faston march away from him. A furtive smile touched his bitter mouth. He had waited years, it seemed to say, for victory over his ancient enemy. Now it was his, full measure and running over. He it was, Edith gathered from the by-play she was witnessing, who had somehow inflamed the countryside against Jeremiah Horne. He was the inspiration of the grim patrol. . . .

**W**HAT was he up to now? The youth out of sight around the curve, Scantell had come abruptly to life. He whirled, dropped to his knees, fumbled at something under the hedge. He lifted, without his rifle, grasping a large brown, paper parcel.

He was through the gate, his long legs eating up the gravel bye-road that curved across the unkempt lawn. He reached the porch, went out of view under its slanting roof.

The old farmer was out again, before Edith could move, was hurtling back to the turnpike, his hands empty. He shot through the gate, scooped up his gun. . . .

He was pacing back the way he had come, ramrod stiff, relentless seeming as before. Just as a rise in the hedge hid him, his head twisted and he looked straight up at the window through which the girl was peering.

Uriah Scantell was gone. He had known all the time that she was there. He had meant her to see what he had done.

What *was* it he had done? What had he so furtively dashed across the lawn to leave on the porch below?

Edith swung around. Bewilderment was a sick whirl in her head as she darted across the room, as she threw herself down the twisting stairs and through the almost total darkness that now invaded the lower floor. The revolver was in her right hand, but her left found the knob of the big entrance door by instinct, twisted it. The heavy portal swung open.

The bundle was on the threshold, right outside. Edith snatched it up, slammed the door shut again. The parcel felt bulky, irregular, as though it wrapped many smaller containers. Queer. She must see what they were, at once.

She switched on a light. Yellow glare from the fixture behind her jabbed her eyes with sudden pain, threw her shadow on the age-darkened oak panel she faced. Her vision cleared and the girl stared at the crinkled brown paper of the package she held.

She ripped an edge, tore a long triangle from it. Rounded glass of a mason jar gleamed through the aperture, sorried ranks of preserved string-beans within it. Food! It was food Scantell had brought to her. But. . . .

An edge of white paper rimmed the edge of the hole. Edith clamped her revolver in her armpit, tugged the paper out. A pencilled scrawl sprawled across the crumpled sheet. The girl read the words:

"They'd kill me ef they knowed I was doing this, but I had to take the chance. I'll try and get Doc Rawlins through to you. U. Scantell."

**L**AUGHTER twisted in Edith's breast. Of all the people of Welcome Valley, of all Dad's neighbors, the only one who had any mercy, any bowels of compassion for him, was Uriah Scantell. Jeremiah Horne's only friend was the man he had hated for nearly two decades!

He was playing along with the others

as the only way to help. A member of the quarantine patrol, he could sneak food in to them. He could permit Doctor Rawlins to pass. . . .

But Rawlins couldn't do Dad any good. It was Harry. . . . Edith remembered Martha Scantell's promise to call back and report whether she had been able to reach Harry, realized that the time since that promise had been made was long, too long. Something must have gone wrong. She'd call Martha, find out. . . .

Swinging around to carry out that intention, the girl was stricken abruptly rigid, all power of movement gone from her, a taut, quivering statue.

Where the telephone should be there was nothing but bare, white plaster, gashed where the bolts that had held the box had been torn out of the wall from which copper-ended wires curled, black tendrils like winter-blasted vines from a frost-riven trellis. The instrument itself lay on the floor, a mess of disjointed wood and wire and battery, utterly useless!

She was cut off now, completely cut off, from all human contact. But fraught with despair as that predicament was, it formed only an iota of the terror that greyed Edith Horne's face, that froze her blood, that wrung an unheard whimper from her pallid lips.

Here was proof indeed, devastating, nerve-shredding proof, that within the house, locked and barred against intrusion, an unseen prowler lurked. That telephone had been intact when she had gone upstairs. While she had been up there something had materialized to smash and destroy it, and had vanished again into the fearful limbo of non-existence whence he had come.

A laugh, a footfall, the slither of fabric against a rough surface, a shadow—logic had explained these, denying that any enemy had won within the stone walls

that made of the Horne house a fort. But *this*—logic, reason, could not deny. Material hands had done this thing, malevolent hands. The old house was no longer a fort. It was a jail, caging her in with terror.

The revolver thudded to the floor. Scantell's package slipped from Edith's numbed hands, struck her foot. She didn't feel the pain of it, but the fall split the bundle open. Jars, a loaf of bread spilled out, a roasted chicken. The girl stared at them dully. Old Uriah had dared much to fetch those here, but they would never be eaten. The fearful phantom was tired of waiting, he would strike. . . .

"*Edie!*" A high-pitched cry shrilled from within the curtained sitting-room doorway. "Where are you, Edie?" There was the sound of a scuffle, of a vicious, animal snarling. "*Edie! EDIE!*" Terror-edged, the keen knife of her father's scream slashed the invisible bonds of eerie fear from Edith's limbs. She whirled around, flung herself through the portieres into the room whence the agonized call had come.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Attack from Behind

THE complete darkness that flooded the great chamber was tempered by light seeping past the curtains from the hall. In the grey dimness Edith Horne was aware of a black bulk swaying above the sofa where she had left her father. a confused dark mass in the darkness.

As she neared it the murk revealed Jeremiah's ghastly face, his flailing, claw-like hands. *And no one else!* He was battling with something invisible, unseeable. . . .

"Dad!" Edith screamed, seeing him thrown back, hard, on the sofa. She seemed to feel the blast of a cold wind



blown past her, of an icy, impalpable presence that passed her and was gone. Then she had reached the couch, had thumped to her knees beside it, was gathering her father in her arms.

"Daddy dear," she husked, managing to get the words past the constriction with which nightmare terror clamped her throat. "Daddy. What has happened? What . . . ."

"Hush, baby," the cracked lips whispered. "Hush. Sleep, baby Edie. Sleep. Mother's gone away, but Daddy will take care of you. Always. Forever and ever." A gnarled and twisted talon reached out to stroke her hair, caressingly. "Sleep, baby Edie. Sleep."

The suppurated, lashless lids were tight shut, as Edith had last seen them, but from between their yellow granulations tears squeezed out to creep down the brown and scaly cheeks.

The chill of panic subsided a bit in the girl's bosom, and pity welled up within it, helpless grief. The wraith with which her father had been battling, she became aware, was real only in his own delirium. The effects of the drug she had administered were wearing off, but he was still under the injection's influence. He had been fighting a phantom of the long-dead years, was reliving now in his beclouded soul a scene out of the vanished past. The Edie for whom he had cried out was not his daughter but his lost wife, whose name she bore. Edith herself was the infant he thought himself fondling.

"Asleep," the agonized tones whispered. "Baby's asleep, but I can't sleep. Edie might come back while I'm asleep, and go away again because I won't be awake to tell her I forgive her. Tell her—" the mumble changed to the hushed drone of prayer—"tell her, God, that I forgive her. Tell her I will be here always, waiting for her return. Bring

her back, God, when You think I have paid enough in suffering for the happiness You gave me and now have taken from me."

In his delirium Jeremiah Horne was lifting the veil from the secret he had hidden from his daughter for eighteen years. She knew now that her mother had not died then, might even still be alive. She knew why her father had always prayed, in the moments of her greatest joy, that The Lord should not ask too great a price of her in payment. . . .

**H**ER mother had gone away, and all these years her father had been waiting for her return.

"Till the day I die, Edie, I shall wait right here, in the house I built for you. . . ."

Edith was conscious of a feeling of shame, as though she were eavesdropping on the conversation of a soul with its Maker. She should not permit it.

"Father," she said firmly, though her lips were trembling. "Dad, dear. You must be quiet." Sometimes a cool, calm voice would penetrate a sufferer's fevered dreams and lull him into silence. "You must sleep. I'm right here, father, to watch over you."

"Watch. . ." The delirious babble caught at the word. "Where's my watch, Uriah?" She had succeeded only in jarring the wandering mind into another channel. "You promised to give it back to me as soon as you got back. . . . Lost it! Pay me? Man, what are you saying? There isn't money enough in the world to pay me for that watch. Didn't you read the words on the case? 'Edith to Jerry' She gave it to me. She—And you want to pay me. . . . Damn you! *Damn you to hell*, Uriah Scantell. I'll. . . ." He was struggling again, surging against his daughter's embrace "Never forgive—never. . . ."

"Hush, Dad. Please hush," the girl pleaded, desperately. "You'll hurt yourself. You'll. . . ." He was pathetically weak. She had once seen him throw Elmer Barnes, the hired man who was half his age, in a wrestling match, pinning the fellow down in sixty seconds, and now her own puny strength was more than enough to hold him.

"Friend," his struggles subsided, but his dreary monotone continued, rephrasing an ancient tragedy. "Wife. Both gone. Only little Edie left, only. . . ." The voice trailed off into silence.

The trembling girl held the pitiful hulk of her father in her arms. At first she was aware only of sorrow for his long Gethsemane, then she was pondering the revelations of his delirium for some explanation of their present dreadful situation.

There was none. Even the notion that Uriah Scantell was somehow behind their predicament was effectually banished—if it had remained after his effort to aid them. The grudge that had lain between the two old neighbors was founded only in her father's grievance against Uriah. Scantell had none, could have none, against him.

It did not really matter. Nothing mattered, except that somehow she must keep Dad alive till Harry got here. Harry would save him. . . .

She'd get the chicken, make a broth out of it. A hot broth would give Dad strength. . . . First she must have light in here. It was the darkness that was so horrible, pressing about her, hiding within it shadows that might be. . . . No. She mustn't let herself think of that either. Above all, not of the intangible, malignant presence within the house, that by all the rules of reason could not be there.

Light. . . . But light was agony to

Dad. That was easy. She'd blindfold him.

Edith tore a strip from the hem of her slip, folded it across the yellow scars of her father's lids, knotted it behind his scabrous scalp. That done, she glided back to the entrance doorway, found the switch tumbler there, thumbed it up.

It clicked—and that was all. The chandelier in the ceiling did not flare. the brooding gloom remained. Something had gone wrong with the current in here—or had been made to go wrong! But there was still light in the hall. The girl pulled at the portieres, pulling them wide to let that light come in.

Her hand tightened on the curtain edge. Out there, on the floor where she had dropped them, lay the jars of preserved vegetables, the roasted chicken. But the revolver was gone:

She remembered distinctly that container of beets rolling against it. Perhaps she was mistaken. Perhaps the gun was against the nearer wall, where she couldn't see it from in here.

It took effort to make the single step across the threshold. It took more will power, more sheer strength than all the hospital stairs Edith had had to climb in her three years of training. She managed it. . . .

The revolver was not there. She was weaponless. Defenceless.

Suddenly she felt hands grab her from behind! She saw one on her arm, a gnarled, brown-scaled talon. The other was on her throat, clamping it, throttling her scream. Edith tried to twist, managed only to get her head around, to see a slavering, contorted mouth drawn away from yellow fangs, to see gory eyeballs, pupils shrunk to pinpoints, staring into her own dilated pupils. The effluvium of her father's dread disease was almost palpable.

The claws cutting off her breath tight-

ened with infernal power, twisting her head back so that she could no longer see that horror-mask. Her lungs heaved, fighting for the breath that was denied them. The hall was a whirling, yellow luminance to her tortured sight. It was darkening, as strength seeped out of her.

Her water-weak legs buckled. The choking grip on her larynx was all that kept her from falling. Through the giddy dark mist that whirled around her, that whirled within her brain, she heard a cackling, mindless laugh, high and shrill and triumphant.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Plague Spreads

**P**AIN tore at Edith Horne's throat, tortured her eyeballs. A hand fumbled at the neck of her frock, loosening it to strip it from her.

She struck out, blindly, viciously. Her wrist slapped into a palm that closed on it, held it motionless. "Easy," a voice said. "Easy there, Edie. You're all right. You're all right, I say."

The girl's eyes flew open, and she was staring up into the bearded countenance, the twinkling blue eyes, troubled but kindly, of old Doctor Hugh Rawlins!

"Easy does it," he said again, and she remembered that gruff, tender voice saying just that the day Doc Rawlins took her tonsils out. "I'm not going to hurt you. No one's going to hurt you."

The girl thrust herself up to a sitting posture, stared wildly about her. She was on the floor in the hall. She saw through into the sitting room, and her father was again on the sofa against the further wall, sleeping as though he had never left it.

Her gaze came back to the physician. "How—how did you get in here?" Had he seen that unnatural attack? "The door was locked." Pray that he had not. Pray silently that he had not.

"I have a key." It was still in his hand. "Your dad gave his to me when he first took sick, so that I could come and go as I pleased."

Rawlins had a key—he could come and go as he pleased. . . . But it wasn't he who had smashed the 'phone, who had tried to kill her. It was Dad. . . .

"What happened to you? I came in and found you on the floor here, passed out."

"I—" She caught herself. She must not let the doctor know that it was her own father who had attacked her. It was the delirium that had made him do it. The fever. "I don't know. I—I must have fainted." Her hand went to her throat, to hide the marks which must be there. But Doc must already have seen them. He must be wondering how they got there. "It's—it's been so terrible, waiting for you, not knowing what to do for Dad."

"I know." His tired old voice, consoling. "It must have been a shock to you, finding Jeremiah as he is. I can understand what you have been feeling. I worried about it, all the time I was working over Martha Salant. I. . . ."

"Over—Martha!" Edith exclaimed, catching hold of Rawlins' sleeve. "What do you mean? What's happened to Martha?"

"Never mind Martha," he evaded. "It's you. . . ."

"Tell me!" The girl's cry was edged by hysteria. "Tell me. I've got to know. Don't you understand? I've got to know."

The doctor shrugged. "She's dead. Her throat cut. She was lying over the switchboard when they found her. . . ."

"Her throat. . . . When? When did they find her—like that?"

"About fifteen minutes after you 'phoned me. She was still alive then, but

she couldn't talk. I had a patient in the office and hadn't left yet, when. . . ."

"Fifteen minutes. Fifteen—Maybe she got the call through. Maybe. . . ."

"What call? What are you talking about?"

"I wanted to get Harry out here. Dr. Harold Gorton. . . ."

"Of Midwest? The endocrine gland specialist. . . ."

"Yes. Martha said she wasn't permitted to connect me but she would tell him herself. She. . . ."

"That's it then! That's why!" Rawlins straightened, his bushy eyebrows beetling, the eyes beneath them stormy, suddenly with some obscure emotion. "By asking her to do that you condemned her to death!"

**E**DITH was somehow on her feet. "Death! Doctor Rawlins. . . ."

"They overheard you and they killed her trying to keep that call from getting through, just as they would have killed me if they'd caught me sneaking through the bushes to reach here. They. . . ."

"Who?"

"All the men of Welcome Valley." Rawlins twisted, pushed out the light. Edith heard the front door knob rattle, then it was open. Cool, sweet air came in. "Look, Edith," the old doctor grated. "Look out there."

A moonless night lay black over the countryside. But yellow sparks flickered, a far flung line of them, against the velvety blackness. They made a great arc midway up the hills, its horns swerving to the road, and the girl knew without being told that the circle of bonfires was completed behind the house.

"They're in the hills," Rawlins whispered, "all around, from where the turnpike from Midwest City comes over the gap in South Mountain to the depot in Wellton. I wondered why they'd called everyone out to do that, instead of just

patrolling the road as they have been right along, and now I know. They're not going to let Gorton get through."

"Then, he's coming!"

"Yes, he's coming. But he won't get here." There was grim foreboding in that low voice in the dark. "Hiding in the bushes, waiting my chance to slip by, I overheard two of them talking. Now I understand what they meant."

"What did they say?"

"'Don't worry. He'll be stopped at South Mountain. If he argues, they'll know what to do.'"

"What?" the girl gulped. "What will they do?"

"They killed Martha Salant, didn't they? If Scantell didn't stop at that, he won't stop at another murder."

"Scantell!"

"He's their leader."

"But. . . ." Edith's lips shut off what she had been about to say. A grisly suspicion was forming at the back of her brain.

"But what?"

"Nothing. Close the door, Doc, and let's go in to Dad. I don't care what happens to anyone else. You've got to help him. "You've got to do something for him."

"I'll try again." The door slammed shut, and the light went on again. "But I've given up hope. His case is beyond me."

"Go on in and examine him. I want to pick up these things before they get spoiled." Edith bent to them, hiding her face from the physician's probing eyes. "Maybe you'll think of something."

He wouldn't, she thought, watching his feet move away from her, moving one after the other into the sitting room. He wouldn't even try. He had betrayed himself by that last remark, that Uriah Scantell was the leader of those who had

drawn the ring of death around the Horne homestead.

Uriah had risked his life to bring this food here. He had been willing to risk his life again to pass Rawlins through the lines. He had not been called upon to do that.

Of course not. Because Doc had been already inside those lines. Doc had a key to the house. He, and only he, could have entered it to rob it of food. To smash the telephone. Before that—how easy for him, a physician, to do it, how difficult for anyone else—he had infected Jeremiah Horne with the illness that was destroying him. He had suggested the quarantine, had frightened the valley dwellers with his report of its awful infectuousness, till that quarantine was being kept up with almost insane fervor.

He had come in, just now, at the exact instant to save her from the sick man's attack. That was why he hadn't noted the weals at her neck, left by those choking talons. He hadn't wanted to question her too closely. He had been too anxious to get over to her his warning that any hope of outside aid was futile. . . .

**G**OING through the doorway he had pulled the portieres together behind him, but there was light shining from beneath them. He had known how to get light in there, because it had been he who had shut it off.

"Jeremiah!" That was his voice, inside. "Jeremiah, wake up."

He had probably given Dad an injection of atropine to counteract the morphine. "What," Edith heard her father mumbled thickly. "What . . . . who?"

"Hugh Rawlins, Jeremiah." Doc was speaking low, very low, but Edith could hear him because her ears were keener than most, and because she was straining to hear. "I've come back again to talk to you. To beg you to change your

mind. Sign it. I've got it here." There was the crisp rustle of paper. "If you sign it they'll let me get a specialist from Midwest, and maybe he'll be able to save you. Sign it, Jeremiah."

"Never! I will never. . . ."

That was it! A great light suddenly dawned on the girl. Rawlins wanted Dad to sign some paper. Till he did he would keep him alive. After that. . . .

"You'd better, Jeremiah. If you don't you'll die here. Tomorrow or the day after. And after you're gone it will be Edith who will sign it."

"She won't. Before I die I'll tell her not to and. . . ."

"That won't do any good, Jeremiah. Because they'll keep her here too, till she does."

"Why should they keep her here? She's not sick. . . ."

"Yes she is," the low voice interrupted. "I saw her just now. Her eyes are blood-shot, Jeremiah, like yours were when this thing began. And there's a little spot of brown on the back of her hand."

He was lying! He must be lying. But the light did hurt her eyes. She had become so accustomed to that it had ceased to mean anything. Her hand. . . .

Edith stared at the back of her left hand. There *was* a brown spot on it—a dark brown scale!

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Satanic Scheme

**"E**DIE!" The hollow, quivering agony of that half-scream from behind the portieres, its infinite horror, might have come from the girl's own mouth that in actuality emitted only a rasping gasp more eloquent than any scream could have been. "Not like me! Not my baby!"

"Yes, Jeremiah." Rawlins' hateful

voice was low-toned, inexorable. "She's got it, and I can't help her. Nobody can help her as long as we are trapped in here."

"All right. I—"

"No!" Wrath beyond reason ripped the monosyllable from Edith's throat. "Dad! No!" She rushed through the portieres into the room, stood with hands imploringly out-stretched to her blindfolded father who was sitting up on that sofa, a ghastly caricature of humanity. "Don't give in to that fiend."

Rawlins spun about to her, his bearded countenance that always had seemed so benevolent, so venerable, suddenly a false-face of malignant fury; his eyes blazing hatred.

"Fiend! You don't know what you're talking about, Edith. . . ."

"I know." You infected me just now, while I was unconscious. You infected Dad and came back to be in at his death, to put him in that. . . ." Her arm jerked up, flinging a gesture at something which leaned against a wall. In the murk that till now had cloaked this room she had thought it only an angular shadow, "In that *coffin!*"

A shrill, mad laugh jittered from her contorted lips as she stared at the roughly made casket. Crudely hacked together—*Dad had made it himself*. Alone, deserted, before all his strength was gone he had painfully hewn his own death box in pitiful anxiety that his violated body should at least have decent burial.

"Ghoul," Edith shrieked at Rawlins. "Vampire!"

"You little fool!" He leaped at her, all pretence of benevolence gone, his bearded countenance distorted with fury. He towered above her, a hypodermic in his hand, its keen needle stabbed at her as he hurtled toward her.

Edith's own hand swung at him in purely instinctive desperation. A mason

jar she had not realized it still clutched flew from it, crashed square on Rawlins' forehead.

The doctor went down like a pole-axed steer.

The girl shuddered, gazing down at the fallen giant. She had done this. . . .

Suddenly she found she was trembling no longer. She was oddly calm. "Dad." She turned to her father. "I—" He didn't hear. He had fainted. The frenzy of excitement draining his fever enfeebled constitution of its pathetically small strength, his monstrous body lay prone beneath the sheet. On the floor beside it there was a long, legal-looking document, lines of typewriting black across it.

Edith walked quite steadily to the couch, picked up the long foolscap. "Jeremiah Thorne, hereinafter known as the party of the first part," she read, "agrees to sell to MOON PETROLEUM PRODUCTION COMPANY hereinafter known as . . . . right, title and interest . . . . land in Welcome Valley bounded. . . ."

**T**HE Moon Petroleum . . . . Recollection thumped behind the girl's temples. She saw again the stagnant waters of Dark Pond, the iridescence filming its surface. That was oil. . . ! She was beginning to understand. There was oil under the Horne homestead. Producers had discovered it, had offered to buy the land. Dad had refused to sell. He had sworn to remain here till he died, waiting for his lost wife, and he would keep that oath in spite of hell itself.

This contract to sell was what Rawlins was trying to force him to sign. But why should Rawlins . . . .?

Wait! Development of the valley as an oil producing center would rescue its land-poor denizens from their poverty. They owed the physician thousands upon

thousands, debts accumulated through the decades he had served them. He had never expected to collect these, but if prosperity came to his patients he would be paid and at one stroke become independently wealthy. With hundreds of laborers coming in, that wealth would increase. . . .

Jeremiah Horne's obduracy blocked all this. Rawlins had evolved a demoniac scheme to break it down, and with the utter depravity of a conscienceless man debauched by avarice, he had put it into effect.

He had poisoned the old farmer with some obscure and dreadful virus. Playing upon their fear of contagion, and their own frustrated hopes of fortune, he had inflamed Dad's neighbors to their puzzling, fierce hatred of him, so that they would go to any lengths to maintain the quarantine he had set up, even to the extent of what they regarded as legal murder.

And then she had walked blithely into the trap. His precautions set at naught, Rawlins had changed his tactics. He must force the signature from Jeremiah Horne before he died, or, failing that, must use the same diabolical means of persuasion on the daughter.

That was why he had spied on her. That was why he had killed Martha Salant, trying to prevent the message to Harold Gorton from going through, had smashed the telephone so that Edith wouldn't know it had gone through. He had waited until she reached just the right pitch of terror to make her amenable to his will, and had been forced to intervene to save her from her father's delirious attack, scaring him off by the rattle of the door knob. While she had been unconscious—Edith stared at the sore on the back of her hand—he had infected her with the horror.

The soft lines of her face had hard-

ened, until it was a lined, white mask utterly without emotion. Her mouth was no longer a rose-red curve made for kissing but a straight, grim, colorless line.

She pushed through the door to which she had stalked. It swung shut behind her. It fitted closely into its jamb, so that no light seeped through, and the darkness in here was absolute, but Edith did not pause. She went steadily into the murk, making for the back entrance to the house, that had been bolted against her—was it only two hours ago?

She went through that door. She walked on into the night where the fires burned over which crouched men who would shoot her on sight, as they would a rabid dog. She was leaving the father she loved with an ardor magnified by pity for what he endured, alone with the man who had inflicted upon him that torture. It was the only way she could make certain of Dad's safety.

She might be killed. She was almost certain to be killed. Yet her death would save her father. For if the land went to the State it would be years before the Oil company could negotiate for its possession.

She might be killed, but if she could get through to South Mountain, if she could intercept Harry Gorton where the patrols would stop him, she would tell them what she had learned and they would let them both through. Harry would know how to cure Dad and. . . .

The touch of her groping hand on the door's painted surface interrupted her dreary thoughts. Edith's fingers slid down the boards, found the bolt. It rattled metallically. She shoved it out of its socket. . . .

There was the pad of a slithering foot-fall behind her, a low, bestial snarl! A moving bulk, black against black, loomed before her. The overpowering fetor of the plague swamped her, and a horny

something rasped her cheek. It fastened on her shoulder, and a laugh, toneless and horrible, beat at her ears.

**T**HE girl lashed out, extremity of terror lending her savage strength. Her little fists pounded on skin that was not skin but a scaly, repulsive integument. They jolted the attacker's grip loose from her shoulder, a long strip of her dress ripping loose with them.

Her assailant lurched back to the assault, snarling. She was involved in a maelstrom of combat, of battle invested with a strange primeval savagery, with a supernatural ferocity. Claws lacerated her, tore more and more of her frock from her until she felt she was almost naked. She fought back, fury whimpering in her throat, her own little hands clawed, her carefully manicured nails tearing flesh that was rotten somehow, under its dry shell. She fought hopelessly, knowing she could not win, knowing that the unseen terror must overwhelm her at last.

What was it? What in God's name was it? Speculation vanished as the thing swarmed over her, as she tottered backward under a sudden access in the fury of its attack. A hand—she could feel that its fingers were stubby, mere rotted stumps—pressed against her breast, thrusting her against door, crushing her flesh. . . .

The fierce pain aroused the reflex of a final savage effort within her. Edith twisted away from it, her shoulder battering into the attacker, thrusting him away for an instant. She heard it squeal, scutter back. . . . But in the instant's respite her frenzied hand had found the doorknob, twisted and jerked it open. The wood thudded against her lurching antagonist, held him back for another split second as she scraped through the narrowing opening, sprawled headlong into the bush, sprang to her feet again

and ran, breathlessly, agonizedly, through the night.

The door slammed again, behind her, and she knew that the mewling thing she had fought was out. She heard its scutter behind her. It was otherwise silent, and she was silent, fleeing between the circling lights that told of danger almost as terrible as that which pursued her.

They were men she could see clustered about those lights. But she could see their ready rifles too, and she knew that if she veered toward them they would shoot first and question afterwards. She could only keep going, straight ahead, along the long axis of the valley, hoping against hope that in the darkness she might lose her pursuer, might evade him.

The fleeing girl looked ahead again, picking her way through tangled bushes of some fallow land she had reached. The withes slashed savagely at her, cutting her, reminding her excruciatingly that she was half-naked, that her body was netted with lacerations, wet with her own blood. She splashed through a shallow brook, stubbed her toe against an unseen rock, sprawled on the further bank.

The fall knocked breath out of her. She tried to get up again. She could not. All her strength was gone. She could only lie here panting, gasping, tremors shaking her like an ague, while the thing she had out-distanced hunted her down.

**E**DITH could hear it, as the blood pounded in her ears subsided, rustling in the bushes, snuffling. A tiny hope grew in her as that sound grew no nearer, as finally it moved away.

The monster had lost her trail. She was safe, safe. She could lie here and recover her strength, and when morning came she would manage to let the quarantining villagers know, somehow, what



she had found out. Dad would be safe till then. She would be safe.

The stars circled giddily. Edith turned her head to escape their vertiginous dance. They were cut off by the stygian shoulder of South Mountain, a jog in it the depression where the Midwest Turnpike came over the spur and down into the Welcome Valley.

And suddenly shining on that turnpike was a pair of automobile headlights!

A long finger of light shot upward, a spotlight reaching into the sky. It blinked. Once. It blinked four times, rapidly. A pause and the signal was repeated.

The signal! Harry's signal! He had taught it to her in the first days of their courtship so that she should know he **was** outside the hospital and would slip out to meet him without subjecting her to the catty gossip of the Nurse's Dormitory. One dot. Four dots. Radio code for E. H. That was Harry's car and he was signalling to her that he was coming. It was Harry. . . !

The oncoming headlights were abruptly motionless. A figure was revealed in their beams. A figure, and a rifle levelled at the unseen driver.

At Harry!

They had stopped him. But he would not let them stop him from her. He'd argue with them for awhile, and then he'd lose his temper and fight to get through. They'd shoot him!

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Killer

**E**DITH hadn't realized how far she had run from the house, with the eerie thing pursuing her. There was only some two hundred yards between the brook and the pass, but that two hundred yards was all up-hill, so that they seemed infinitely long to the desperate girl.

The struggle for air seared her laboring lungs, every step was a separate, terrible agony. At last, however, foliage was a dancing, leafy screen against headlight glare ahead of her, and Harry's angry voice pounded through to her.

"I'm not arguing with you any longer. If you don't know a quarantine doesn't apply to physicians I'm going ahead anyway. Get out of my way or I'll ride you down." A starter whined, a motor roared into life—and a rifle bolt clicked.

"Stop," Edith screamed, catapulting out into the road. "Stop, Harry! Don't shoot. Don't."

"Edith!" Harry exclaimed. "Good Lord . . . ."

"Edie Horne," Uriah Scantell swung to her. "You . . . ."

"Uriah!" He was alone in front of the physician's sleek-nosed roadster. "You're going to let Dr. Gordon through. You've got to. Doc Rawlins is fooling you all. He poisoned Dad and made you help him in his terrible scheme."

"Whut's this?" The farmer's gaunt face was grey, hollow-cheeked above the rifle-stock that hugged his shoulder, and there was shock in his bleared, dark eyes. "Whut's this ye're sayin', Edie? Whut are yuh drivin' at?"

"What happened to you, Edie? You're torn to pieces. What . . . .?"

Edith ignored her lover for the moment. "I've found out all about it. Listen, Uriah." The story, as she had reconstructed it, spilled from her in a spate of tumbling words. "You aren't going to let him get away with it, are you, Uriah?" she finished. "You're going to help Dr. Gorton reach him and save him. I promise Dad will sell to the oil company afterward. I'll get him to, now that I know why he refuses."

"I didn't hold with whut they was doin'," Scantell replied, ponderingly. "But I didn't dare go again 'em. I don't dare

naow. *They* wun't believe yur story, though I do. S'posen we wait tull mornin' and I'll put it to 'em."

"It will be too late in the morning." Dr. Gorton said. "The girl who called me described Mr. Horne's symptoms. The sensitiveness to light, the hypertrophied joints and scabrous skin, are typical of an aggravated form of botulism, a fungous disease. I brought along the only cure for that, but the treatment must begin at once. Mr. Horne will be dead by morning, almost certainly. I'm surprised that he has lasted as long as he is."

Scantell's head swung around to him. "An' yuh kin save him if yuh git ter him now?"

"I'm quite sure I can."

The old man shrugged. "Guess I got ter take th' chanct then. Look here, yuh go 'cross these fields, th' way Edie come. The rest uh th' watchers'll be expectin' me ter stop yuh, an' they won't be lookin' fer yuh ter be comin' that away."

"That's sense." Harry's lank, lithe figure swung out of the car, a physician's strapped black bag in his hand. "Tell me just how to go . . ."

"You can't go that way," Edith interrupted. "Not alone. There's something prowling the fields—something horrible. It almost caught me, almost killed me. You can't get by it unarmed."

"Something—what do you mean?"

"I don't know. All I know is that it did this to me. I caught one glimpse of it, and it looked like Dad looks, only more horrible. I can't understand . . ."

"I kin," Scantell broke in. "Thet's Elmer Barnes. He got th' same thing Jeremiah did, only he went crazy an' broke loose. We bin huntin' him daown, but we couldn't locate hide nor hair o' him by daylight. Whur he's been hidin's a mystery."

"In the house!" Edith exclaimed. "He found some hiding place in the walls and

lay there all day, prowled the countryside at night. But never mind that now. He's out in those fields and he'll ambush Harry when he tries to get through."

"Give me your gun, mister," Gorton said. "Give me your rifle. I'll know what to do with it."

"No," Scantell shook his head. "I wun't give it ter yuh. But I'll go along uh yuh, and git yuh through."

"Come on," Edith exclaimed, impatiently. "Let's get started."

"**W**E'RE getting started, but not you, my dear. You're staying right here in the car. There's another bag with salves and antiseptics, and you know how to use them. Take care of yourself."

"All right." A veil dropped over the girl's eyes, as she yielded. "Go ahead." She too was poisoned with the fungus of botulism, but she wasn't telling Harry that now. And there was something else she held back. "Be careful, my dear. Oh be careful."

"I will." Harry wheeled, went into the bushes. Scantell went after him. Edith listened to the rustle of their progress down the hillside, her hand to her naked breast, her head cocked to one side.

And then, quite suddenly, she slipped into the thicket. Her old skill at woodcraft came to her aid, and she became a pale wraith gliding almost soundlessly through the lush tangle, following the two who went steadily onward, unaware of her.

The girl could not have logically explained why she did that. She knew only that some inner tingle of peril had warned her not to let her sweetheart out of her sight. A vague premonition that the night cloaked some hidden danger not yet revealed.

The couple ahead reached the bottom of the hill, went into the narrow clearing from which she had glimpsed the signal-

ling spotlight. They paused, scrutinizing the black mass of shrubbery on the other side of the brook, and Edith halted, hidden but close behind, watching.

"He might be in there," Scantell whispered. "Yuh go ahead an' I'll cover yuh from here whur I kin git free swing with my rifle."

"Good sense," Harry responded, and splashed into the stream. Edith's straining eyes imagined they saw the bushes thicken to one side of him. Was it a lurking form . . . .?

Abruptly Scantell's gun swung. Its barrel stock metallically against Harry's temple. The physician slumped . . . .

Edith screamed, darting out of her hiding place, launching in a long, frantic dive at the man who had reversed his gun now, was driving its butt down to crush her fallen lover's skull. Her hands flailed at Uriah's arm, jolted it so that the lethal blow missed. Then his elbow pounded her away from him. She went to her knees in the water.

The rifle arced around. "Edie," Scantell grunted, and the lethal weapon leveled to point-blank aim at her breast. "This is better than I thought. I'll get rid uh you too, an' . . . ." Orange-red flare blasted into a sprawling, black something that leaped in front of her at that last instant. The thing yowled, pounded down on top of her. A warm fluid gushed over her. Blood!

A lurid oath burst from Scantell's lips and he tugged at the contorted, grotesque leg of that which had momentarily saved Edith's life in its mindless effort to take it. Only momentarily! The farmer was dragging it off his victim, dragging it away to get a clear shot at her.

It was off and Scantell's rifle thrust at her again. It sputtered flame—harmlessly into the ground. An arm had shot over Uriah's shoulder, fingers had grasped the rifle butt, swerved it aside. Harry's arm!

Harry's fingers! They wrested the gun from the assassin's grip, and a fist drove against the farmer's jaw. He went down. Sprawled half-in, half-out of the water.

"He didn't—get me—squarely," the physician gasped, as though himself surprised at his coming to the rescue. "You all right, Edie?" A yellow shaft jabbed the darkness from his hand, splashed light over her, over the yowling thing Scantell had dragged from her.

THE yellow disk wavered, revolted by that which it had struck out of the darkness. The girl was vaguely aware of distant shouts, of the far-off footfalls of running men. The mewling of the twisting monster, its whimper of fearful pain, held all her attention.

It was the brown-scaled, horror-visaged thing that had attacked her in the hallway and with which she had fought in the kitchen. It was Elmer Barnes, naked of any garment, blood poring from a gaping gash in the side of his body that was far gone in the foul corruption of the sickness that made him mad.

But Barnes, for the moment, was a madman no longer. The edge of Gorton's light fell over Scantell's sprawled form. Barnes saw it, pushed himself to his haunches, thrust a shaking, accusing talon at the farmer.

"He—" the rotted mouth gibbered—"he poisoned th' water up at th' spring on his land. He took care uh me when I run away. When Edie come he sent me ter climb down th' chimney from th' roof an' kill her. I did everythin' he said because he promised ter make me well, an' then he shot me—shot . . . ."

The last word popped through a bubble of blood, and there was no longer any life in the tortured man. Gorton swung around to Scantell . . . .

The farmer leaped up. "The hell with

yuh," he snarled, and darted away into the darkness.

"Stop him," Harry yelled. Edith was aware, suddenly that there were men all about, rifle armed, who had streamed down from their sentry posts at the sound of the firing. They had heard Barnes' accusation, and now they were pounding after the fleeing Scantell.

Edith found herself running too, Harry alongside of her. "Spread out," someone shouted. "Don't let him get away."

Scantell couldn't escape. He was making for his own farm, for the abandoned orchard on the hillside; but there were men coming out of there, too, heading him off. They were streaming in from both sides, were herding him to where the black glint of Dark Pond would stop him. There was something horrible in that chase, something horrible in that futile flight. It was a fit climax to the night of terror.

The fugitive was caught, was trapped by Dark Pond. He paused on its very edge. "To hell with you," he yelled, and leaped into the oil-filmed black pool.

Edith thought he shouted something else as he leaped, something that sounded like her own name. "Edie!" But she must have been mistaken.

THE grey glimmer of dawn lay beyond the windows of the Horne house, their shades raised at last. A muffled chug, chug beat against them, the voice of the gasoline pump draining Dark Pond from whose depths Scantell's body had not risen. Jeremiah Horne was a bandage-swathed mummy on the sofa, sleeping under the influence of an opiate. Edith, almost as thoroughly bandaged, sat alongside him.

Harry Gorton, his long task finished, smiled wearily down at her. "There young lady," he said. "Your father will recover, and your own infection didn't

take hold enough to require more than a minimum dose. Happy now?"

"No. And I won't be till Doc has forgiven me for what I did to him, and what I thought of him."

The venerable physician's keen eyes twinkled. "I don't know that I ought to forgive you for that clout on the head, Edie. But for the other, I guess you were in a condition to think anything of anybody. Especially when you saw Scantell bring you that basket of food and thought that proved he was your friend."

"Yes. And I still don't understand why he should worry about that. He was going to have Elmer kill me anyway."

"He wanted to make sure. Edith, that food was infected with the fungus of botulism, every last bit of it! Just as the food in the kitchen was, that I destroyed when I was first called to treat your father. The water wasn't enough, he poisoned the food too. I was bringing food and water from my own home to Jeremiah until Scantell succeeded in getting the villagers to stop me, with his talk of the wealth the oil would bring to them. What I don't understand is what started him on the scheme. He always said he had nothing against Jeremiah, although your father wouldn't talk to him from the time your mother—disappeared."

"I know why that was. The old watch . . ." Footfalls on the porch outside cut Edith off. There was a rap on the door.

"I'll go," Harry said, and the portieres hid him. There was a waiting silence in the sitting-room. Edith noticed that the chugging of the pump had stopped, leaving an empty, throbbing hush.

Then Harry was back. His face was queer. He held something in his hand, his surgeon's fingers hiding it.

"Dark Pond is drained," he said. "They found Scantell's body. It didn't come up because his arms were around a skele-

ton at its bottom. A woman's skeleton. There was a rock tied to the bony legs, holding it down. And this was in the mud alongside."

He opened his hand. An old-fashioned, big-cased watch lay in it. The mud had been wiped away, and even from where she sat Edith could see that there were letters cut into the gold.

"What—what does it say on the watch?" Edith didn't recognize her own voice. "Read it."

"'Edith to Jerry.' That's all."

THE girl's mouth opened, but she couldn't say anything. She couldn't . . . . Doc Rawlins said it for her.

"That's the answer!" he exclaimed. "That's the watch Jeremiah loaned to Scantell, and that Scantell said he had lost. He *had* lost it. It had fallen into Dark Pond, when he killed Edith Horne and threw her body into it. She never ran away. She was never unfaithful. She died protecting her honor, and Dark Pond protected Uriah's secret. He thought he was safe till Jeremiah set up the pump and started to drain the pool."

"And then he knew he had to stop it," Edith broke in. "But the oil company would have drained the Pond too. He found a way to stop them both. By making Dad and Elmer so terribly sick that they couldn't work, and scaring the villagers and the company's agents away from the house so that the land couldn't

be sold. You almost fooled him by bringing the contract in and trying to get father to sign it. That's why he sent Elmer back in here, to kill, not me but you."

Hugh Rawlins shrugged. "I've tried for forty years to understand the vagaries of the human mind, and I'm just where I started. There's only one thing I've learned. Whatever evil a man does, however well hidden he thinks his guilt may be, punishment overtakes him at last.

"Jeremiah suffered terribly for nearly a month. You suffered for a day and a night. But think what Uriah Scantell suffered for eighteen years, looking down every day from his hillside on the dark waters beneath which the evidence of his terrible crime lay, visible to no eyes but his own. You asked me to forgive you, Edith, a while ago. I ask you now to forgive him. He has paid, bitterly."

"He did one thing for me," Edith said softly, "however little he intended it."

"What was that, dear?" It was Harry who asked, for her glowing eyes were upon him.

"Dad always prayed that God would not make me pay too much for any happiness that came to me. I won't have to do that any more. I've paid, already, for the greatest happiness that I shall ever have."

Harry Gorton didn't ask what that was. He knelt beside her, and took her in his arms. "You'll have to pay only me for that," he murmured, and took an installment of that payment from her lips.

THE END

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# The Murder Child

By Donald Dale

*Women have gladly paid great prices for beauty; but no woman ever before was called upon to pay as much as Alicia Morgan—when she found that in return for eternal youth she must bring a demon child into the world. . . .*



I PAUSED on the sidewalk to pull up my stocking, and that was how I first met the man who called himself Dr. Louis Barthold. My conduct may not have been in the best taste, but surely the catastrophe that marred my life was

not a just consequence of that slight indiscretion.

I had gone downtown to meet my husband, and just before I turned into the building where Jack had his offices, I paused to run a finger up the seams of

my silk stockings. One was wrinkled. I bent over to pull it up. I was proud of my slender legs and, you see, I had been married only a month and was desperately in love with my husband.

I straightened up, and as my skirt fell back over my knees, I gave it a satisfied pat. Then I saw the man.

He was sitting in a black limousine parked at the curb. All I could see of him was his hunched back and his unusually large head. It seemed to move questingly on the thick neck rooted in heavy shoulders. His full red lips were smirking.

His eyes, monstrous behind thick lenses, seemed to strip me of every article of clothing. If I had known what this appraisal of my body portended, I would have died in terror on the spot—instead of living to barter decency and the life of my husband for treacherous beauty.

But I only flushed, tossed my head, and walked hurriedly away. I was so sure of my attractiveness to men that I took their interest as my right. I knew nothing then of the incalculable evil of which man is capable.

**I**N the next month I saw Dr. Louis Barthold in the corridor outside the offices of Jack's theatrical producing firm, on the street near our house in the suburbs, in stores where I was shopping, and once in the subway, quite close to me in the crowded Time Square Express. Foolishly I gave little thought to the matter. Usually I caught no more than a glimpse of his retreating figure as he hobbled away, a cane aiding his twisted legs to support his thick body.

In the subway, however, I had a chance to study him at closer range. I saw him in the mirror of my vanity case. He was right behind me. The only impression I retain from that time or later is of his great age. I don't just mean that he

seemed old. He did, and as later circumstances showed, he was—incredibly old, in fact. But, above and beyond the marks of many years, there was a peculiar *timelessness* about him, as though his life should be numbered in centuries, not in years.

Now that the events are past, I realize how fully I was to blame. If I had not sought after knowledge God never intended for the daughters of Eve, the doctor would have been powerless to harm me, and through me the one person I loved beyond all else—my husband.

In defense I can only say that I was young, a woman, and fanatically in love. My husband, in his business, came into daily contact with the beautiful women drawn from all parts of the country by the irresistible lure of the stage. Foolishly, I underestimated the power of love, and felt I could never be sure of Jack unless I remained always as beautiful and vibrantly young as the day he proposed.

That was the bait which Dr. Barthold used so cunningly—*eternal beauty*. Do not scoff . . . . *I had it!* For years, instead of aging, I grew daily more beautiful. Time passed me by without exacting its customary toll.

But I paid—in *another way*. I was caught in a trap, and in my womb was planted the spawn of evil. To a hell-escaped soul I gave, unwillingly, an earthly body.

**T**HE room was heavy with incense. A brazier glowed with fire. The malformed shadow of Dr. Barthold danced crazily on black velvet drapes. Busily he hobbled from cabinet to crucible. His hand dipped and the fire rose fiercer as if at his command. Sulphur fumes choked me.

This scene was not new to me. Six times that month it had unrolled before my eyes, and at the proper moment I had

joined the doctor in the Litany of Lucerne. In my mad desire for eternal beauty, I had snapped at his bait the first time he dangled it before me. I felt no fear, and the insensate vanity of woman thrust me forward eagerly into the rituals, without a caution for the dangers of the secrets I was probing. And doubt never entered my mind. From the first I somehow *knew* the doctor could do what he claimed.

But he never told me all. That is my only defense. I swear that nothing, not even my mad desire to hold Jack's love, would have let me be a part of the unholy plan. It was unwittingly that I conspired to defeat God's laws. I knew too late what I had done.

This was to be the last ritual. At the beginning it seemed as innocuous as the others. We stepped into the protective circle chalked on the floor and after the doctor I intoned the strange words which to me were only meaningless syllables.

But gradually I realized there was a difference. Names, dreadful-sounding names that before had not been in the litany, were dropping from the doctor's lips . . . "Axaphat . . . Kakos . . . Sarcueil . . ." Fearfully I repeated them.

"Abaddon . . . Baaberith . . . Behemoth . . . Belphegor . . ." the doctor intoned. After each name he exclaimed fiercely, "Pray for us!"

A hollow feeling filled me, but mechanically I repeated his words: ". . . Behemoth, pray for us! Belphegor, pray for us!" I grew faint.

Then, as from a great distance, I heard my voice repeat: "Sabasius, pray for us!"

"*Sabasius!*" I screamed . . . Sabasius, master of the Sabbat, high priest of the legions of Lucifer.

I knew now what the doctor had done. The harmless ritual of our former meetings had been abandoned, and the doctor was summoning the dread convention of

demons. I had helped him unleash the power of hell, and it was at his command.

My own screams ringing in my ears, I tried to break through the circle, but my feet were rooted to the ground. A great rushing of air shook the room. A host of dim shapes seemed surging convulsively behind the smoke from the fire. I shut my eyes and tried to pray. I could not.

I began to sag to the floor but stiffened with the shock of the Doctor's next words. They held a doom for me so brutal that the words seemed to take shape in luminous letters on a screen before my eyes and defy my efforts to erase them.

"This term of my life," he chanted, "is almost at an end. Another seventy years have run through the hour-glass, and once more my soul is forfeit to your master.

"Therefore I remind you of our covenant made in the days of Herod. For another three-score and ten years let my soul stay on earth, and give me a new body to house it. It is my right according to our compact, sealed in blood that Samain Eve so long ago.

"And in exchange for my own soul, to which the master will not lay claim during the course of another natural life-time, I promise to substitute. Until my new body waxes strong, I will shadow the chosen victim. Then, I will send his soul to Lucifer.

"So let me live again through this woman. Let her give me new life to do the will of Lucifer, Lord of the gleaming darkness. Let her bear a child to house my everlasting soul."

**W**HEN I awoke, I was in a cab. The pleasant, familiar vistas of Long Island were sliding past the window. Bright sunlight splashed across the landscape. I recognized the street—I was but a few blocks from home.

Abruptly memory returned and I cried out in agony. Words were ringing in my



ears as though just spoken. "Let this woman bear a child to house my everlasting soul" . . . . I was doomed to perpetuate a loathesome servant of Satan! . . ." "When my new body waxes strong, I will" . . . . I was to mother a killer! . . . . "I will shadow the chosen victim!" . . . . Who? Who else was to suffer because of what I had done? . . . Oh God, I must go back, force the hellborn doctor to free me from the fate that hung over me—month after month, feeling my womb swell with a child of terror . . .

"Stop!" I cried aloud.

Obediently the driver brought his cab to a stop.

"Take me," I began, and then I realized that I did not know where I had been. I had always met Dr. Barthold in one of the large hotels, and then blindfolded had been driven in his hearse-like limousine to his apartment.

"Take me," I repeated, falteringly, "to the house where you picked me up."

"What house?" growled the driver, peering around at me queerly; "it was a big black limousine—at Times Square."

All hope of appeal was cut off. My doom was sealed.

I slumped in despair against the cushions and murmured weakly, "Go on, then." In a few moments the cab drew up at the door of my house.

That night, without any respite for my tortured mind, came the first proof of Dr. Barthold's power. I had a dream—*or was it a dream?*

It would be easy to call it such, to consider it but a natural consequence to the horrible experience of the day, and what later happened could be attributed to the prenatal influence of a morbid imagination and disordered mind. Psychologists speak glibly of such things. They never experienced such a vivid, convincing dream—and its soul-sickening aftermath.

When Jack come home from the office

that terrible day, I had not been able to prevent him from seeing that there was something wrong. I pleaded illness and used the unseasonable heat as an excuse to make a place for myself to sleep alone on the porch.

I tossed for hours. At last I fell asleep, for how long I do not know, but suddenly I was full into the horrible dream.

Dr. Barthold lay beside me. He took me in his powerful arms and the caresses of his old man's hands made my flesh crawl. But I could not move.

His full red lips were smothering me. He held me close. Closer . . . . I could not even struggle. A weight lay upon me—the guilt of what I had that day done. This was punishment . . . .

At last he released me, and then I screamed. Pitifully I cried out my shame, and even as I struggled to a sitting position, I thought I heard the retreating sound of his panting breath. Unquestionably awake now, I was sure I could see his deformed figure hobbling down the porch steps and into the long shadows that lay on the lawn. I could not be mistaken about the tapping of a cane on the sidewalk, which I heard so distinctly through the still of night . . . .

Jack thought I had had a nightmare. I let him think it. Shame and terror stilled my tongue.

A few weeks passed uneventfully, and I was slowly coming to think of all my relations with Dr. Barthold in the light of a fantastic nightmare.

Then I discovered I was with child.

**A**LL my terror returned a hundredfold and with it the horror of complete helplessness. If I should flee to the ends of the earth, I should carry with me—*within me*—the thing that threatened. There was no escape.

I shrank from telling Jack. We had often talked of our desire for a child, and

I wondered how I could endure his joy.

Hour after hour on the day I found out, I tried to reassure myself about my dealings with Dr. Barthold. I was preparing for the ordeal of Jack's joy.

As the day wore on, I was almost convinced that nothing had happened to me except an unpleasant experience with a loathsome charlatan. So, crowding into the back of my mind all remaining fear, I decided to tell my husband of my condition as soon as he came home from the office.

I was in our bedroom putting the finishing touches to my dinner toilette when I heard Jack come into the front door and down the hall. Trying to ignore the rising tempo of my heart, I turned to greet him.

In that instant all my false hopes crumbled. Beyond all doubt the child in my womb was the Devil's gift to Dr. Barthold. And in the same searing second I realized who was to be the victim when my child's body waxed strong. Inescapably certain both these truths were made by what I saw as Jack stepped into the bedroom.

The brilliant make-up lamp clamped on my dressing table mirror fell full upon him. Springing malignantly from his feet to the white door, was a twisted, malformed, hunch-backed, shadow—the shadow of Dr. Louis Barthold!

THE days that followed were an agony of despair. Jack was to die. *I will shadow the chosen victim*, Dr. Barthold had said; he had meant it with ironic literalness. And I, who adored Jack with every fibre of my being, had brought this doom upon him.

I hated the unborn child in my womb. Each time I felt it stir with quickening life, I wanted to tear at my vitals, to root out the spawn of hell.

I felt as though I were in the jaws of a

giant nut-cracker. As the months passed by, the pressure became unbearable.

From time to time I would see, for one brief flash, the malignant mocking shadow behind Jack. I had no chance to forget.

One compensation I had, and I believe it saved me from insanity. Each day, as my beauty seemed to become more glorious, my husband's love grew more ardent. Every afternoon, I spent hours before my mirror, preparing for Jack's arrival from the office.

His love is all I have left, I thought fiercely. And then I wondered—for how long? But quickly I drove the question from my mind. Until the child had grown strong Jack was safe. Meanwhile, perhaps there was some way . . . .

One gloomy, grey afternoon, about seven months after my terrible dream of Dr. Barthold, I dressed myself carefully, looking forward to Jack's homecoming.

With one last look at my reflection, I went outside to meet Jack. I took a point of vantage at the corner of the small lawn, pleased with the effect, on such a dismal day, of the red splash of my dress against the ferny green of the huge tamarack.

Before long I saw Jack's fine, tall body swing around the corner two blocks away, and down the street toward me.

As he returned my wave and hastened his step, my heart quickened. So many women had loved him and now he was mine, all mine. I had always known he was the only man in the world for me. Without him life would hold no meaning, and now, as my beauty increased, his love for me was growing day by day.

I stood watching my husband striding along the street toward me, my blood tingling with passionate thoughts, the creature inside me almost forgotten.

Suddenly Dr. Barthold was beside me. He had changed. His deformed body, dwarfed by the giant tamarack, had grown feeble, his full red lips were shrunken,

and his mocking eye gleamed with desperation. He spoke, and though his voice was but a feeble whisper, it cut deep into my mind and released hidden reservoirs of fear.

"I can wait no longer," the terrible voice said. "The sand runs out. I have kept my part of our bargain. Now keep yours—before it is too late."

I sank to the ground and great pain beat at my body. I heard the sound of Jack's running feet, and then his tender arms closed around me.

That night my baby was born.

I WAS only partly under the anaesthetic. One part of my mind was awake. Though I felt no pain, I knew that in a matter of seconds the baby would be delivered. I was aware of the efficient movements of Dr. Jenkins, our family physician, and the nurse, the restless pacing of my husband.

But the other part of my mind was in a dream, a terrible dream. First my closed eyes saw only inky darkness, but I sensed a hidden menace. Then the blackness began to move restlessly. Suddenly, looming out of it, strode Dr. Barthold.

No longer did it seem a dream. As though I were watching him with my own eyes, I saw him hobbling furiously along a street, his deformed shadow trailing behind, shortening and thickening, then leaping ahead, long and lean.

I recognized the street. It was that on which this house stood! With a horrible certainty I sensed his destination . . . .

Now he was passing under a great tamarack. He was in front of this house—our home . . . . Turning in . . . . crossing the porch . . . . quietly opening the front door . . . .

I thought my mind would snap as I followed him, in this dream more real than reality, down the hall to the room where I lay waiting the coming of my child. Al-

most I could hear the tattoo beat out by his cane.

Then I did hear a sound. My mind was swept clear of all dream-like fantasy. Sharply awake, I was sure of the sound I had heard—a low thud against the hall door.

Fast on it came another sound—an infant's cry. My baby was born!

I opened my eyes. Jack stood over me, smiling gently. From months of habit my eyes flashed to his shadow. It was straight as my husband's own body!

For one second my heart raced with elation, with hope that . . . .

Then I saw it. On the wall was the silhouette of Dr. Jenkins and the newborn infant in his hands. And the tiny shadow of my child—was *hunchbacked*.

It was too much. I tried to cry out but could not. I had always known it would happen, but the reality was far worse than the anticipation. Jack's days were numbered. I turned my head, looking for him. I needed him, needed his comforting touch.

But Jack was walking toward the door, saying, "Excuse me, dear, I thought I heard a sound at the door a moment ago."

I struggled to a sitting position and turned. Just as I did, Jack opened the door. I saw a black-clad figure topple stiffly forward into the room, crash to the floor face down. I screamed.

I heard Dr. Jenkins say, "Here, nurse, take the child," and then he cut across my vision, stooped over the man on the floor.

"Dead," I heard him mutter, "heart failure."

"Who is he?" I cried out, my hands clenched, every muscle in my body rigid.

Dr. Jenkins turned his head, looked at me—curiously, I thought.

Jack strode over to me and caught my hands. "Lie down, dear," he said; "you must be careful of yourself, now. He's just some poor old devil whose time had

come. Must have been passing by when he had the attack and tried our house as the nearest place to get help."

"... old devil whose time had come," I repeated to myself, and then I cried out wildly, "Who is he? Who *is* he?"

Dr. Jenkins reached a hand into the dead man's pocket and pulled out some papers. Then he said, "His name was—Dr. Louis Barthold."

**F**OR two months I hovered between life and death. Physically I was well. It was the will to live that was lacking in me.

Jack believed I was suffering from the shock of the "accident" that occurred the night our son was born. I could not tell him what I knew—that he must die by the hand of that child.

How could I tell him? I could only wait, and hope that before it was too late, something might be done to avert the tragedy that approached closer each day our child grew bigger and stronger.

Looking at the child, one would never have dreamed his body housed a soul steeped in centuries of evil. He had a strange, ethereal beauty that brought a sob to my throat. Like Tintoretto's cherubs, his round baby face wore a serious look, and his big blue eyes bespoke infinite wisdom.

But I knew what he really was. Even his baby gestures toward Jack had a threatening suggestion, though Jack, in his prideful love for his son, seemed unaware of any strangeness. I knew that Dr. Barthold had claimed the right to the child's body, for the doctor had faithfully kept his bargain with me. Each day my beauty increased, and before long I showed no sign of the dread I lived under, except a deep melancholy which I was unable to hide.

Jack tried to divert me with a furious round of gaiety. It went on for months—

theatres, parties, night-clubs, gambling houses . . . .

One night, when I was dressing to go to the opera, my maid dropped over my head a new Molyneux creation of electric blue taffeta. As she adjusted the jewelled straps and fastened the revealing bodice around my slender waist, my heart rose in ecstasy at the reflection in my mirror. My shimmering golden hair shadowed eyes as blue as the gown I was wearing. A mouth as seductive as Cleopatra's smiled back at me. A delicate pink glowed through the ivory skin of neck and full firm bust. From golden head to jewelled feet, I was perfect, and a reckless joy flooded my being.

"Hurry, darling, we'll be late," my husband's voice was calling.

"All right," I answered, "I'll be right down as soon as I take a look at Jackie."

I walked into the nursery just in time to see my year-old son taking his first steps. "God!" I thought, "how the time is flying."

The nurse knelt, holding out her hands to Jackie, and he was toddling toward her. Ming, the white puppy that Jack had brought him that afternoon, was barking joyfully and darting back and forth across Jackie's uncertain path.

Unable to endure the evidence of my child's rapidly-increasing strength, I turned and quickly left.

I ran back to my room to get my cape, and in a few moments Jack and I were opening the front door to step into a night of gaiety. I had not taken long in my room, but it was long enough for the enactment of a horrible tragedy.

Just as we were about to step outside, a torrent of shrieks and screams came from upstairs. The nurse's voice! Something had happened to our son!

Jack was the first to overcome the paralysis of fear that gripped both of us. I followed him as he dashed up the steps.

At the head of the stairs, Nurse threw herself at us, obstructing our progress. "It was not my fault. I was gone only a moment. I swear it—just ran down the back steps to get his orange juice. I swear I was not gone long," she babbled on, hysterically trying to excuse herself.

Jack pushed the woman aside and rushed to the nursery.

When we got to the doorway, I thought Jack was going to faint from sheer relief. His son, so far as he could see, was safe.

As for me, I looked on a sight that proved again how faithfully the devil's bargains are kept . . . .

While the nurse and Jack jabbered nervously about threats of kidnappers, I stood there and looked—and knew all. Month by month, the hand of the murderer was strengthening. Jack's doom was approaching faster than I had thought possible.

Ming lay on the floor, dead. Stiff and wide-eyed, as one moving in a state of hypnosis, I knelt to examine the little dog. His tongue protruded from his mouth, mute witness to the fierceness of the fingers that had squeezed his tiny neck. His two eyes were gouged and bleeding.

I looked at my child. He stood firmly, baby feet planted wide apart, and looked with cherubic innocence on the scene. His tiny fingers were discolored with blood.

I looked at his shadow. Yes—it was twisted and hunch-backed.

**M**Y husband believed he could guard our child against further kidnapping attempts by installing more and more elaborate systems of burglar alarms, by hiring a body-guard for the baby, by soliciting the aid of the police.

But I knew what he couldn't know. It was Jack, not the child, who was in danger. Death was drawing steadily nearer to my husband. Nothing could

save him from this child conceived of Satan.

After he had killed the dog, I watched, terror-stricken, for each new evidence of Jackie's strength.

Jack, however, was a happy father. He gloried in his beautiful, fast-growing son, showering him with toys and devoting much time to trying to entertain him.

But the child seemed always strangely aloof. And at times, when Jack was trying so eagerly, with awkward masculine overtures, to win Jackie Boy's approval, I was frightened at the child's unnatural response. Sometimes I thought I saw flicker over the baby countenance, a queer, unreal look of cruelty completely incongruous to his infant beauty.

The next few years passed with uneven pace. Time dragged with the weight of remorse and then leaped forward toward inevitable tragedy.

Each birthday of my child pointed toward the time when his body would be strong enough to serve the devil that possessed him.

One evening, during our child's sixth year, my husband was, as usual, spending the hour after dinner playing with Jackie. I sat in the room, with them, trying to read, but as always when the two were together, tense with a vague fear.

That particular evening the strain was worse than ever, for Jack had brought Jackie a new toy—a clever trick knife whose movable blade slid back into the hollow hilt with the slightest pressure against the point of the blade.

In a realistic game of "cops and robbers" Jack had illustrated the device of the hollow handle, "stabbing" his small son and allowing Jackie, in turn, to use the knife. I could hardly suppress a scream each time I saw my ill-starred child grip the knife in his strong little hand, and plunge it toward his father's heart.

But the long, terrible years had taught me control and I sat there saying nothing, almost in a state of self-induced hypnosis.

Presently Jack, as grown-ups usually do, grew tired of the game. "Won't that be enough for a while?" he asked, smiling, and, still sitting on the floor, leaned against the couch and lit a cigarette.

As Jackie bent over to retrieve the toy knife, I was suddenly aware of a peculiar tenseness in his body.

Then what happened came so quickly that I was as powerless to move as if frozen in a block of ice.

From Jackie's feet a thin, black line shot out, thickened, took shape—and became a twisted, hunchbacked shadow. A queer expression of cruelty swept over the face of the metamorphosed child.

Then, in one continuous movement, he smashed his heel against the hollow handle of the collapsible knife, swooped, and snatched the converted weapon from the floor.

With catlike swiftness he lunged at his father—then with one sure stroke, drove the knife into Jack's breast.

**D**R. JENKINS said that Jack's wound, if kept free from infection, would cause no serious trouble. A few days in bed and he would be as good as new.

"I see that I'm not a good judge of toys," Jack said, smiling in spite of his pain.

"I suppose you have disposed of that trick knife," said Dr. Jenkins, seriously. "You must realize that if the child had been a little stronger, or if it had been a better knife, you would not be here now."

"Yes, I didn't know how easily those knives can get out of order," said Jack excitedly. "Just to think that it could have happened to Jackie instead of me!"

And once more I had to walk alone with terror.

I knew now that I had to do something

—immediately. Finally I came to a heart-breaking decision. I would go away with the child. If I put the ocean between him and his father, Jack would be safe.

It must have seemed strange to my husband that I should choose the occasion of his illness to tell him of my desire to go abroad. But somehow, desperation guided my tongue and lent credence to my flimsy excuses.

And so it was agreed that just as soon as my husband was out of bed, my child and I would leave for Europe.

**"I** THINK we can let him get up tomorrow," Dr. Jenkins said, as he completed his examination.

Standing beside the bed, I could see my reflection in the dressing-table mirror. It reflected my loveliness, the incredible beauty which was priced so high. But it could not reveal the tumult in my heart.

Jack would be up tomorrow. That meant I could take the boy away—put thousands of miles between him and the father whose life his presence constantly threatened. But it also meant I should never see my husband again.

After Dr. Jenkins left, I made Jack comfortable for the night, saw that Jackie was tucked in, and went to bed in the room adjoining my husband's. I left the connecting door slightly open so I could hear if Jack called me.

For a while I tried to read, but my nerves were ragged from nights of vigilance. I just lay thinking, the bed lamp still on. Tomorrow at this time. I thought with a dull ache, I would already be far away . . . .

What a presumptuous fool I was to assume that I could forestall fate.

It was a sound from downstairs that first alarmed me. It seemed to come from the kitchen as well as I could place it.

It was dark. I could hear nothing. So

I went downstairs and thereby lost precious seconds.

From the foot of the stairs I saw the light coming from the kitchen and hurried toward it, a terrible premonition preparing me for what I saw.

The kitchen was empty, but a wide-open cabinet drawer told me what had happened. It was the drawer in which the knives were kept!

As I ran desperately back to the stairs, I realized the possessed child must have eluded me in the dark. Even now he must be stealing into Jack's room.

"What havoc my vanity has brought about," was my last wretched thought as I hurled myself across the landing and burst into my husband's room.

"Stop!" I shrieked, and for a second the downward thrust of Jackie's hand was stopped.

The light that struggled through the partly open door to the other bedroom was dim. But it was enough to burn the scene into my brain as long as I live.

Jack lay on the bed in deep sleep. Over him Jackie stood, the heavy butcher knife still arrested in midair by my shriek.

**T**HEN the child slowly turned and I could see his face. Malignancy, time-old evil contorted it, but there was a trance-like suggestion that made me know that my son—my *own* son—knew not what he was doing.

"Wait! Jackie, *wait!*" I pleaded frenziedly. I knew I could not cope with him physically. If I could only delay him for a moment . . . .

I ripped the robe from my shoulders and whipped it over Jackie. It enveloped him. He thrashed violently.

The fabric began to rip, but it would hold him for a second . . . .

With a lucidity that comes only in the greatest crises, I knew what I must do. My lust for everlasting beauty had

brought into the world this demon who snatched at my husband's life. Now I saw there was only one way to stop him. I must do it.

There was a water tumbler on the dressing table. I snatched it up, held it by the bottom, and struck it sharply on the table leg.

Then I fiercely gripped the jagged piece that remained and nerved myself for what I must do. I seemed to know that this was the only expiation I could make.

Jackie was nearly free now. But I was ready. I lifted the cruel circlet of broken glass.

*Then I ground it into my face.*

**D**R. BARTHOLD is gone from our lives forever. The dread shadow that always presaged calamity will never again be seen on earth.

My sacrifice dissolved the unholy compact. God must have taken it as repentance for my sacrilegious questing after everlasting beauty never meant for mortal woman.

Jackie is now like any normal boy of his age. He remembers nothing of this. We three, Jack, the boy, and I, live in a happiness I never thought I should know.

I showed no scar from the glass that cut my face that night when at last I saw the way to save my husband's life and free my child's body of the demon that possessed it.

No—that is not quite true. Something does show, and it is that which will never let me forget the strange man who called himself Dr. Louis Barthold.

At times, when I look my best and my face is full of color—when, in admiration for my beauty, I forget for a moment the high price of vanity—my mirror reveals a pale scar on my cheek.

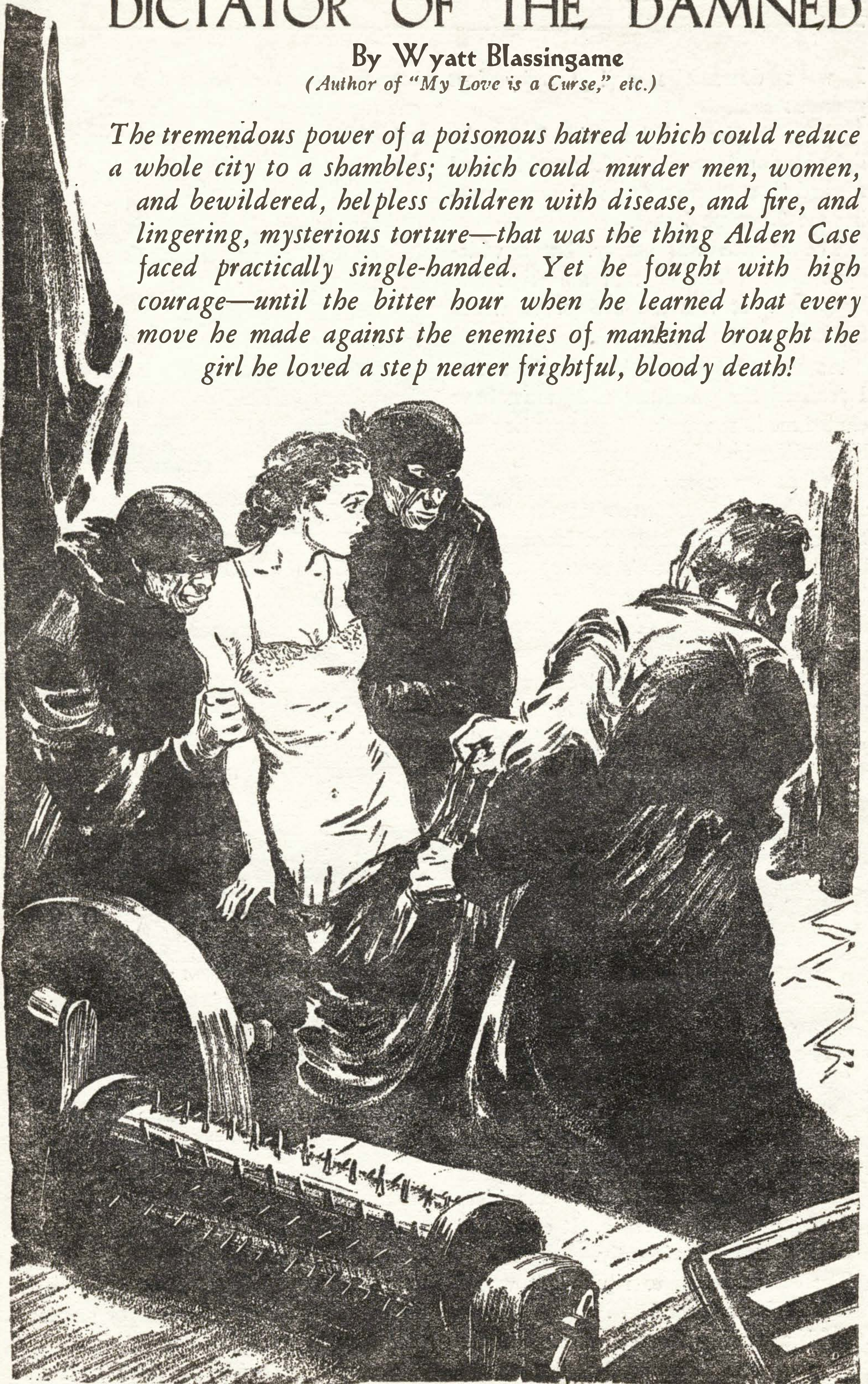
To me it looks like the faint outline of a twisted, hunchbacked shadow.

# DIKTATOR OF THE DAMNED

By Wyatt Blassingame

(Author of "My Love is a Curse," etc.)

*The tremendous power of a poisonous hatred which could reduce a whole city to a shambles; which could murder men, women, and bewildered, helpless children with disease, and fire, and lingering, mysterious torture—that was the thing Alden Case faced practically single-handed. Yet he fought with high courage—until the bitter hour when he learned that every move he made against the enemies of mankind brought the girl he loved a step nearer frightful, bloody death!*

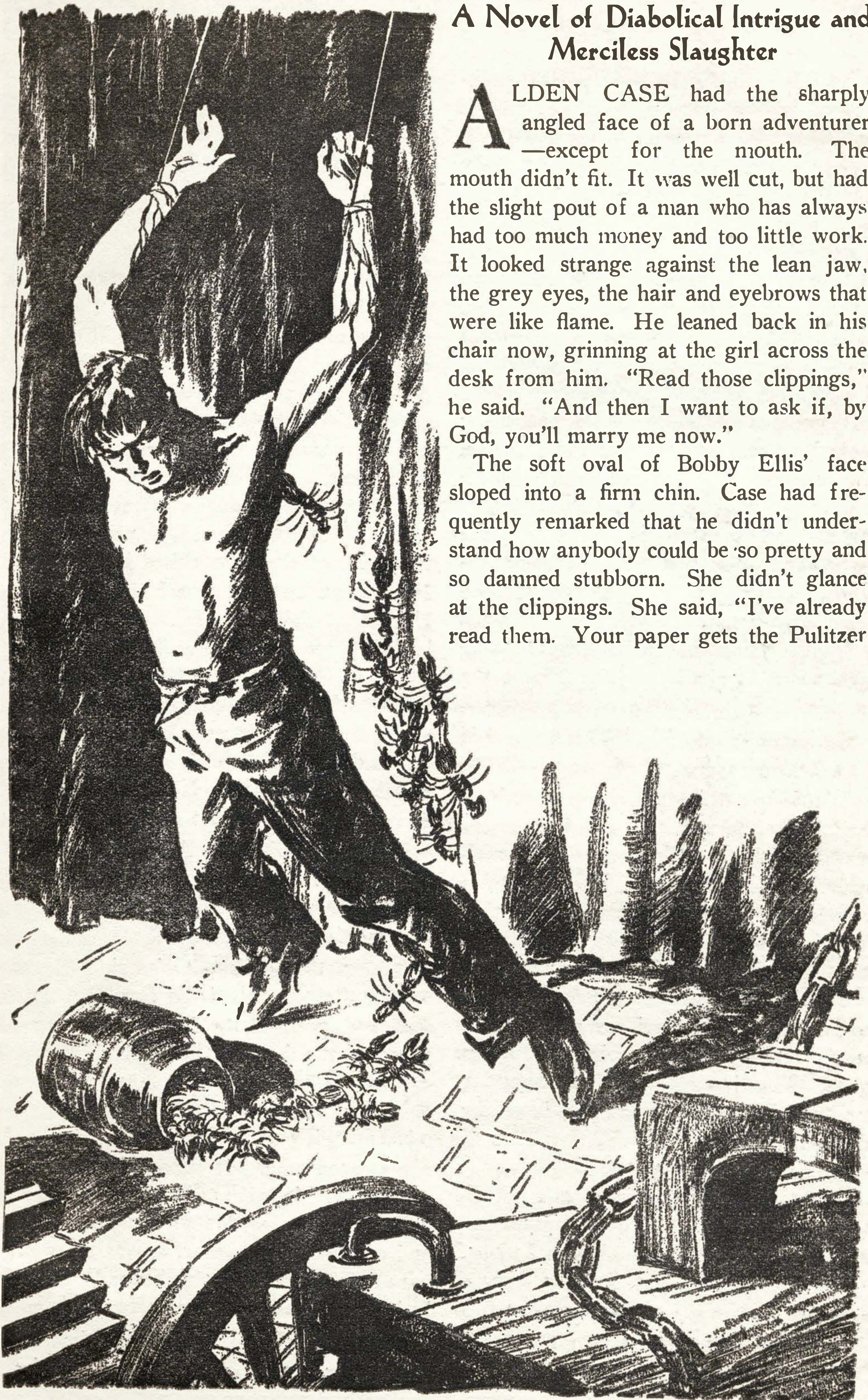




## A Novel of Diabolical Intrigue and Merciless Slaughter

**A**LDEN CASE had the sharply angled face of a born adventurer—except for the mouth. The mouth didn't fit. It was well cut, but had the slight pout of a man who has always had too much money and too little work. It looked strange against the lean jaw, the grey eyes, the hair and eyebrows that were like flame. He leaned back in his chair now, grinning at the girl across the desk from him. "Read those clippings," he said. "And then I want to ask if, by God, you'll marry me now."

The soft oval of Bobby Ellis' face sloped into a firm chin. Case had frequently remarked that he didn't understand how anybody could be so pretty and so damned stubborn. She didn't glance at the clippings. She said, "I've already read them. Your paper gets the Pulitzer



prize this year for its fight against political and police graft in the city. And the publisher-editor personally wins the editorial award for wrecking the fake financial empire of Martin Halliday. They don't mention that Halliday changed into a raving maniac when his plan flopped."

"He was nuts already," Case said. Then he grinned again and reached for her hands. "You wanted me to do some worth-while work before you married me. All right, how about those awards?"

There was pain in her dark eyes as she looked at him. "They won't do, Alden, I'm not going to marry you yet."

The smile left his face suddenly, bringing out the sharp angles. "I've done the work, and even you agree it's worth-while. Have you changed your mind about loving me?"

"No!" There was a hazy mist in her eyes now. "I do love you. That's the trouble."

He shook his head. "I'll be damned if I understand. You asked me to—"

"To do something that *you* regarded as work," she interrupted. "You bought this newspaper, but you've never taken it seriously. You hunted down city corruption as you used to hunt big game in Africa. It was all sport to you, with nothing to lose. You've never thought of your paper as owing a duty to the public, something greater than any individual can possibly be. The whole thing has been a private game. You haven't sacrificed anything for an ideal. I don't think you have any ideal."

Anger turned Case's face as red as his hair. "Because I inherited a few million from my father, you think. . . ." The office buzzer sounded with a sort of furious intensity, and broke short. A sudden quietness, so tense as to carry an almost physical coldness, flowed into the room. Case had the curious impression that throughout the huge plant of the news-

paper, every movement had stopped together.

SCIENCE admits that at times unexplainable psychic occurrences take place. There are those who claim that death and extreme horror cast a shadow before them which can be felt though not seen. In the moment of silence that followed the rasp of the buzzer, Alden Case experienced for the first time in his life the shock of utter, irresistible terror. It jerked him out of his chair, flung him in a wild movement toward the girl as if to protect her from some danger more gruesome than his mind could understand.

The office door opened. A man stepped through and the door closed behind him. He had an automatic in his right hand. He said, "Take it easy, Mr. Case. Sit back in your chair, please."

For perhaps a second Case stood there, still trembling with the reasonless dread which had torn through his body. Then he sat down, a thin smile on his lips. He was very calm now. His hands moved across his lap toward a desk drawer.

The man said, "Put them on the desk, Mr. Case. I don't want to kill you before we've had our talk." He pulled up a chair and sat down.

Under the desk Case's right knee moved slightly, found the concealed button, and pressed it. He did not even glance at the door on the right which had one-way glass, so that Knuckleduster Donohue could watch Case's visitors without being seen. The publisher was not a large man, but he could take care of most of his callers. With the enemies he'd made during his fight against vice and corruption, however, it was safer to have help ready. Knuckleduster Donohue had come in handy before.

"I doubt if you recognize me," the man said. "My face's been changed from the one your newspaper prints."

Case looked at him calmly. It was an arrogant, sadistic face with a high forehead, thin lips, a lean nose cut off squarely at the tip. Bobby Ellis gasped, "It's John Derlington!"

The man bowed derisively, and as he did his eyes followed the slim outline of the girl's figure, the curve of the small, high breasts, the well-shaped legs below the grey business dress she wore. "Smart as you are pretty," he said.

Two emotions blended furiously within Case: anger at the lust in the man's gaze, and shock at the name of Derlington. The most famous outlaw of modern times. A man known for cruel and useless murders, for cunning and courage; hunted by police from coast to coast. A brilliant, educated sadist whose career had shocked and terrified the nation.

"My plastic surgery didn't change me as much as I'd hoped," he said. He turned sharply to Case then, leaning forward in his chair. "I've come with a startling proposition. You'll want to laugh when I first state it. You won't when I'm finished."

"State it."

"First," Derlington said, "I'd better tell you something about the men who are backing me. Perhaps you'll understand then why this proposition's not absurd as it would be otherwise." His voice clicked off short. For an instant there was only the heavy sound of his breathing. Looking at him, Case thought suddenly that the man had gone insane.

"Have you ever thought how a fox must feel, exhausted, and the dogs closing in on him?"

"No."

"I have. Every man back of me has. We've been like that fox for months, and a man can't live at the tension necessary to keep running. He'll go crazy. You've read how Robinson, the kidnapper, was crazy when the G-men got him. Pretty

Boy Floyd, and the others. Can't sleep, jumping up in the middle of the night and leaving because you think maybe the G-men are closing in. You can't eat, running out of a restaurant before the meal is finished, because some guy comes in who might be a cop. Thinking every automobile you see is full of G-men, thinking every fellow who looks at you on the street is going to pull a gun. Living that way something cracks in a man's brain. He'd rather be dead than live like that."

**D**ERLINGTON paused, panting as though his own words had burned the fear through him. Then he was calm again. "My men are wanted for murder. They'll die in the electric chair if caught. You can understand they would be serious about trying to find some escape."

Case said, "Yes." He was wondering what delayed Knuckleduster Donohue.

"Well," Derlington said, "there's a possible way out. I've got men from all over this country who'd rather be dead than hunted. There's more than a hundred of them. We want a full pardon from all the governors and from the president. The least we'll take is some small island possession where we'll be able to lead our own lives. Convicts were used to settle the State of Georgia, you may remember. But we'll want to be completely free wherever we go, and we'll have to be paid a lot of money to go there."

Case almost laughed. And yet the shadow of predestined fear was cold upon him. "Why is the government going to do all this—instead of burning you?"

"For its own good," Derlington said, and his voice was very soft. "You think a hundred men couldn't do much in open warfare. They couldn't. But these men are hidden in your cities. They had all rather die than live as they are doing. Some of them are what *you'd* call insane. They hate society. They'd like to ride

through the streets shooting down children, women, anybody who got in the way. But there are more effective methods of fighting. One man can sometimes terrify a city. Think of what a hundred could do."

Case had a sudden vision of what this mad scheme could lead to, a vision which terrified him, and yet was trifling compared to the actuality which was to follow.

He said, "You're crazy. All you'd succeed in doing is killing a few innocent persons."

Derlington nodded. "It's very likely that we'll fail, but we'd kill more than a few and we'd get fun out of that. We not only have doctors who do facial surgery; we have a scientist or two, and we've secured what they need. Each trick they've planned for us will enable us to kill as if we were a regiment of soldiers—and without exposing ourselves to return fire. Remember, we've nothing to lose—and we may win. There are still islands in the Pacific belonging to nobody. Even if we don't get a pardon, we might escape to an island, but it would require millions to buy the things we'd want. We may get those millions, and have enough of us left alive to take one of the islands. If we went, we'd want women. And we'd take them—the pretty ones."

Unconsciously Case's eyes turned to the girl across the desk. A sudden surge of terror went through him and he came half out of his chair.

Derlington's automatic centered squarely on his chest.

Case sat down slowly. "All right," he said. "But why come here? What have I got to do with it?"

Derlington was pleasant now, smiling. "You are going to help persuade public opinion to give us what we want. You, and the mayor, and the police commissioner, and the governor. We'll give you three days to get us the pardons. If it

hasn't been done—we open war. Then the commissioner and governor can persuade the police and state militia not to be too active."

It was Case's turn to smile. "Yes? And why?"

With his answer the horror that was to drive a city mad began. "Because," Derlington said, "you are going to find it best. This morning we kidnapped the wife of the mayor, the best looking daughters of the governor and police commissioner. And I'm taking this young lady that you are in love with. As long as the four of you do your best for us, nothing will happen to them. But if you don't work for us. . . ."

There was a second of shocked, audible silence. Then Derlington stood up. "She might resist, so I'd best carry her out unconscious," he said. He took one quick step and swung the gun. It made a dull thud striking the back of Bobby Ellis' head. She pitched forward out of her chair.

**A**LDIEN CASE went mad. His chair crashed over as he came out of it, trying to fling the desk to one side. It was too heavy and he whirled around it, growling like an animal, like an animal unconscious of the gun trained on him. His lips were pulled far back from his teeth, his hair was like a flame as he drove straight toward Derlington and his poised gun.

He did not see the door with its one-way glass swing open. He did not see the man with the face of a monkey who stepped through, a gun held by its muzzle shoulder high, sweeping downward. He knew only that thunder exploded on the back of his head, driving him face down against the floor. The room whirled over and over through darkness, so that he had to cling to the floor to keep from falling off into space.

Somewhere a voice said, "Why not kill the guy?"

And Derlington's soft voice said, "No. He's one of these too-rich young men who believe in damn-the-public. He'd sell out the nation to get what he wants, and he wants this girl. He'll help us."

It took Case a half minute to get on hands and knees. He felt sick at his stomach and there were red hot needles still jabbing through his eyes. He had to crawl to reach his desk and the telephone.

Nothing but the hum of a dead wire.

His head was clearing slightly and he got to his feet. The door into Knuckle-duster Donohue's office was open, and he could see the big man tied in his chair, wriggling like a bound elephant. With two reeling jumps Case reached him, pulling a pocket knife as he moved. The ropes parted.

Donohue tore the gag from his mouth and went out of the office like a bull, head down in a blind charge of fury. Case reeled after him, still half sick from the pain in his head. Donohue was gone when he reached the hallway, but an elevator was dropping and he caught it. "The ground!" he snapped. "And cut it loose." The elevator fell like a stone.

It jerked to a stop at the ground floor. Case's head was clear now and he flung open the door, leaped through. His foot struck something rubbery and he went to his knees, saw that he had fallen over the elevator starter, saw the purple-black stain seeping from under the man's chest.

On the curb in front of the building Donohue stood helplessly, looking out into a traffic-filled street in which there was no sign of the men he sought. And between Donohue and Case lay a woman. A crowd was already gathering, but stood back from her, their faces white with horror.

She was middleaged and must have

been pleasant looking normally, but now her face was twisted by convulsive agony. She held both hands clutched over her stomach, writhing round and round like a fly stuck through with a pin. She had bitten her lips until her face was bloody, and through this came the low, whimpering moans of unendurable pain.

A man said, "They came out carrying a girl. The elevator man tried to stop them and they shot him. Then one of them just stepped over and stuck a knife in that woman. 'Just to show 'em we're serious,' he said."

It was a sign of what lay ahead. The knife had been poisoned and the woman was to live for three days before she died in agony.

Now Alden Case stood looking down at the bloody froth across her face and hearing the throat-choked cries of pain.

*The men who had done this were the ones who had carried off Bobby Ellis!*

## CHAPTER TWO

### City of Dread

THE three days which followed were, perhaps, the most horrible of Case's life. The men who had kidnapped Bobby had vanished completely as water dried up by the sun. Though Case roamed the city like a madman he accomplished nothing. And all the while he was tortured by the decision which he had to make.

He knew that he could reach but one conclusion. Bobby would want no other. He would promise to pay the kidnappers for her freedom; they were after money and he was wealthy. He'd give them everything. But he couldn't pervert the news in an effort to establish a precedent which would lay the nation helpless before crime. He knew that, and on the last day allowed by the bandits he walked into the state capitol to meet the governor, the mayor, and the city police commissioner.

They sat around the long table in the governor's office, and no one spoke at first. Case let his grey gaze swing over them, Mayor T. T. Farson was a small, round-faced, blue-eyed man who looked ridiculous because of the big ears which stuck out from the side of his head. He was rated an ordinary machine politician who was neither too bright nor too dull. Case's paper had never proved that he was connected with the graft in the city hall, but it had shown him as rather incompetent. Case knew that the little man hated him, although he had always remained quiet and civil.

At the head of the table, his fat hands trembling slightly as they rested on the table edge, was Governor Gunter. He was a fat, bald-headed man who looked like the cartoonist's idea of a successful politician. It had been his intention to run for the senate before Case's paper started exposing the details of his record. Now it was almost certain he would never be elected to another public office; yet he always maintained a fawning, simpering pose of goodfellowship toward Case.

Of the three men present only Police Commissioner Sam Porter had no real reason to hate the publisher—and he was the only one of the three who openly showed his hatred. He had been a police captain, dull but strictly honest, when Case's blasting had upset the department. Case had wanted a younger, more intelligent man for the new commissioner, and had been forced to compromise on Porter. But the man had a curious sort of loyalty to his former superiors. He hated Case for having exposed them, although he himself had profited.

The governor, made a hesitant, but grandiose gesture. "Gentlemen, we have before us what is probably the most critical problem that. . . ."

"We don't have any problem." Case

said flatly. There were black circles under his eyes from the strain of the last three days. He hated this pompous company and wanted to get out of it, to take up the wild, frantic searching for Bobby; the desperate attempts to contact her captors and buy her freedom. "We've got to fight these men. There's nothing else we can do."

Mayor Farson's round face puckered with worry. "But they've got my wife. They've threatened to kill her unless. . . ." His voice trailed off thinly.

The governor waved a fat hand. "It is true that we have all lost someone dear to us, but I agree with Mr. Case that we must fight these bandits. There is no other choice. What do you say, Commissioner?"

Porter's square jaw bulged. Case had the impression that the man was really suffering over the disappearance of his daughter, but he gave no sign of surrender. "They're running against the law," he said. "My men are after them now. If we catch *one* of them—" his blunt fist clinched—"I'll find out where the rest of them are staying. The one I catch will talk all right. And once we get to their hideout, it doesn't matter if they've got a thousand."

Mayor Farson's mouth trembled slightly. "But they said they'd kill my wife. . . ."

The governor said, "Tut-tut, Mayor. You know they shan't dare go that far. But we must decide. I ask for a vote."

They voted, Farson agreeing hesitantly, Case bitterly, ready to leave. He stood up . . . .

AND then, as though the shadow of death had floated above the capitol, momentarily freezing every sound and motion within it, there was silence. For the second time in his life Alden Case was jarred by the impact of terrific fear rush-

ing ahead of its cause, curdling his blood before he knew the reason.

Through the silence beyond the governor's office came a sound. It was a small, mewling noise like that made by a dumb person, but more horrible than words can ever be. Formless, and yet pregnant with the meaning of unending, insane torture. And whoever made that sound was a woman!

It came toward the door of the governor's office, and within that room the four men stood waiting, each thinking of the woman who had been taken from him. Commissioner Porter's face was greyer than his own hair now. "My God—my daughter . . . ." he whispered, and there was no other sound.

Sweat puffed in thick beads on Case's forehead. He thought of the woman he'd seen in front of his newspaper, writhing on the sidewalk, mad with pain. He thought of Bobby Ellis, of her dark, level eyes within the soft oval of her face.

The low mewling came closer, clear in the silence. "Why don't they stop her?" the Governor said huskily. "There are secretaries out there . . . ."

The doorknob began to turn, and like statues the four men watched it. The door swung open. Case had the curious impression that first he saw men and women in the outer office, their faces bloodless, mouths open, eyes bulging. And then he saw the woman who stood in the doorway.

He was almost sick in that instant, his stomach released from the tension of thinking this might be Bobby, contracted by the horror of what he saw.

She was naked except for a cloak which fell half open around her. From her open mouth ran a steady stream of blood to spill down over her chin and throat and breasts, blood mingled with a white froth. And all the while she continued those horrible sounds of the dumb.

Her tongue had been cut away in the last few minutes!

But her torture had not ended there. Over her entire body there were raw sores—great bloody fistulae that looked as if the infected teeth of animals had gnawed into her flesh.

Mayor Farson's scream was choked, yet it exploded the immobility which had gripped the watchers. "Marion!" he gasped. "Marion, my wife. My . . . ." He took two steps toward her, reeled, and fell flat on his face.

Case moved like a man hurled from a catapult. Whoever had cut this woman's tongue was somewhere in the building. It hadn't been done more than ten or twelve minutes before. He leaped from the office with Porter on his heels. He snapped orders for an ambulance to be called, went sprinting for the doors of the building, ordering everyone stopped.

But whoever had brought the woman there had vanished. She had first been seen in the hall, heading with a kind of insane knowledge for the governor's office. No one had dared touch her.

Back in the governor's office the letter which she had brought lay open upon the table.

A nice case of the black plague, eh, gentlemen? It was necessary to carve the wounds upon her and inject the virus into them in order to speed up the process. It will take somewhat longer to work on other citizens, but the results will be as sure. You might be glad to know that we have released several thousand rats which are carrying the little bug which spreads this delightful disease. It won't take long for them to infect other rats—and so on and on. . . .

We have also released several million mosquitoes carrying various little germs to spread about the city. And we have taken other means of causing death and destruction. But we are still saving the governor's daughter and the commissioner's daughter to see if they won't cease their fight against us. And we have the very beautiful friend of

Mr. Alden Case. It shouldn't be hard for him to persuade the public, with the help we are giving him. However, if he fails, and if you, Mr. Governor, and you, Mr. Commissioner, don't cooperate, why, we'll start in on your ladies where we left off with Mrs. Farson.

Best regards,  
Derlington and Company

"They must have guessed we wouldn't agree," the Governor said hoarsely.

Case said, "And they guessed the hour we were to meet—exactly. I was under the impression that no one knew that except us." He was looking squarely in Governor Gunter's eyes.

Commissioner Porter spoke as if he had not heard. "Just let me get one of them. He'll talk." His big fists were white from clinching.

Case thought of Mrs. Farson as she had stood in the doorway, the blood and froth bubbling from her mouth, the great sores on her body, the muted whimpering. A woman gone insane because of torture. And he thought of Bobby Ellis, of the soft feel of her lips when she kissed him, her voice when she said, "I love you." And he thought of Derlington's note: if he didn't help the outlaw's cause they would work on Bobby as they had on Marion Farson.

But could he save her even if he tried to help Derlington? He remembered the bandit's lustful eyes looking at the girl. And he remembered Bobby saying, "A duty to the public greater than any individual can possibly be." He was beginning to understand what she meant now, although the knowledge tortured him worse than Marion Farson had been tortured.

"If we could only get one of them. . . ." he thought.

But there was no chance to locate one of the criminals in the days that followed. How find a man when only death stalks a city, driving it mad? How find a man

when there are only germs, invisible except through a microscope? The terror of the unknown, the terror of death against which there is no fighting, seized the town. Men who would face bullets and laugh, were whitefaced with dread.

\* \* \*

Jeanie Powell slipped the apron over her head and went into the kitchen. She was dog tired from a hard day's work at the office, but a widow with a five-year old daughter to support can't keep servants. She set about getting supper.

In the tiny living room little Jeanie sat on the floor, her toys neglected about her. She picked up a doll, let it slide through her fingers as though she had forgotten it. A mosquito whined past her ear and she slapped at it listlessly. "Moma," she called, "I feel bad."

Jeanie Powell came into the room, one perspiration damp bit of hair falling over her cheek. "What is it, darling? What's wrong?"

"I don't know. I just feel bad. My head hurts som'en awful, and right here . . . ." She put her hand to her throat.

Terror came in the mother's face as she crossed the room. She touched the child and almost jerked her hand away—because the girl's forehead was fiery hot. Then she had the girl in her arms and was running toward the door with her. "Oh, God," she whispered, "don't let my baby die. Please, don't let her die."

Close to her ear sounded the fitful whine of a mosquito.

\* \* \*

It was one of those huge, frame buildings that often serve as tenements in cities of less than half a million. From the windows people were likely to throw garbage. The halls were dirty and dark. At night one could hear the creak of the building against the wind, the scurrying of rats.

In one room on the third floor there



were three generations of a family. They all lived in the same apartment, jammed together like minnows in a bait box, waiting to be sold. Old Tony Gaspari was reading an Italian newspaper with the help of a magnifying glass. Young Tony was reading the baseball news. Little Maria crawled about the floor making gurgling sounds.

It was Maria's mother who first saw the rat. A week ago she would have kept on with her sewing. Now she screamed. For a moment there was stillness. Even the rat did not move.

Then the baby started to crawl again. She didn't see the rat and was moving toward it. Tony shouted, dropping his newspaper and jumping. The rat fled.

In the corner Maria's mother was whimpering.

Old Tony had not been able to see the rat, but he knew. The soft murmur of his voice praying in Italian filled the room. Young Tony said huskily, "Damn it, I'm getting out of here. There ain't no way to fight the black plague but get away from it. I'm leaving."

The woman said, "You got the job, Tony. You can'ta leave. We starve."

"It's a damn sight better to starve than have the black plague."

"But where we go? We got no money."

He could not answer that. He stood in the middle of the room, holding the little girl in his arms, his face drawn with terror. There was no sound except the soft voice of Old Tony praying.

\* \* \*

"Oh darling," Mary Dardell said, holding tight to her husband. "I'm no help at all. I tried so hard to have everything just right tonight. I was so careful with the stove and all, just like the cookbook said. But it's all burned." She was about to cry.

Johnny laughed and kissed her. He kissed her again. "You'll learn," he said.

He kissed her a third time, very hard. "But if you don't it's all right with me. If you open a can, whatever's in it will taste sweet to me."

She giggled and clung to him. They had been married a week and were too much in love to see straight. It took both of them several minutes to open a can of corn and another of Vienna sausage. They would have had to look carefully to see the tiny punctures in the bottoms of cans and they were interested only in one another.

Half hour later the poison struck them with blinding suddenness. The girl cried out, twisting through Johnny's arms to slide to the floor, lying there pulled into a knot.

Johnny shouted, "Mary! Mary, what's . . . ?" He reached for her, and the pain lashed through him like a sword blade. It knocked him to his knees and he crawled to her.

"Hold me, Johnny," she whispered. "I can't see! Hold me tight."

He said, "I've got to get a doctor."

She tried to hold to him. "Don't leave me. Don't . . . . *Johnny!*" But he was pulling away from her.

They had no telephone. He got as far as the front room of the little bungalow and went down on all fours. He kept crawling and reached the door.

Where was the knob? He couldn't see it, couldn't find it. His hand fluttered like bird wings against the wood, then stopped. In the silence his nails made a loud scraping sound as he went over on his face . . . .

\* \* \*

So terror raced rampant through the streets. Police were in every block, and state militiamen stood about with fixed bayonets. They shot every stray cat and dog, because many of them had suddenly developed rabies; but they could not shoot the mosquitos which whined sometimes

about their heads. They could not kill all the rats that infested the city sewers, that hid in dark basements and vacant lots. They could not kill the germs floating in the air they breathed.

Fear was triumphant and death stalked invisible. Brothers looked at one another with dread, afraid to speak, afraid to touch hands. Wives did not kiss their husbands, because the kiss might mean death. The poor and the rich writhed under the same agony and died.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Death Leads the Parade

**A** GAINST the darkness the streetlights stood out with a kind of gruesome whiteness. Houses were tight shuttered, while inside the families sat waiting for deaths they could not understand.

In front of the Board of Health on Dorval Street an endless line of people waited for inoculations which might save their lives—and might not. They did not stand too close to one another, and in every face there was dread.

Across the street Alden Case stood watching. His clothes hung loose around his body. His face was drawn into lines so sharp they might have been cut from wood. His eyes had caved deep into his head, and they had black circles beneath them.

Under the street light half a block away, a policeman and a member of the national guard stood together. As Case watched, a great bulking figure passed under the light, nodded at the policeman, and came down the walk.

Knuckleduster Donohue rolled up like a baby tank. "Well?" Case asked. His excited voice sounded strange coming out of his dead-tired face.

Donohue shook his head. "The boys at your office ain't learned a thing. They got the wires tapped okay and they're getting

everything that comes out or goes in the home or office of all three of those birds. But nothing's phoney about it. You must be wrong, Boss. None of those guys are the outside man for this gang."

Case sagged wearily. "Maybe I am," he said. "That's the hell of it. I'd kill all three if I knew one was guilty and would break. I can't be certain, but . . ."

Donohue caught him by the arms, holding him erect as he would have a child learning to walk. "You're going home, Boss. You gonna get some sleep if I have to bat you on the head." Half carrying the smaller man he started for a parked car.

Up the street a man cried out. It was not the shrill, high cry of hysteria but low and hoarse, the cry of a man who believed he had suffered too much to know fear again, yet suddenly found his voice retching with terror. Donohue dropped the publisher's arm, and together, rigid, they faced toward the sound.

In the darkness beyond the streetlight something was moving, coming forward. The policeman who had been in the middle of the street was backing away, his hand still raised in the signal to halt. Light shown down on his bloodless face, open mouth and bulging eyes.

Now the thing beyond the light was coming into its glow. A group of men and women marching, silent. There was something dreadful about their quietness and about the way they moved, slowly, hobbling, swaying.

All at once Case began to run. He was within thirty feet of them when the leader reached the middle of the intersection. And Alden Case stumbled to a halt, a hoarse cry belching from his throat. For the man who led the procession had a death-white face, a face unbearably white except for the dark splotch where his nose had been. His mouth was too big, as though the corners had been eaten away.

With eyes fear-cold Case looked at the man's fingers and saw they were gone to the knuckles.

It was a procession of lepers!

**S**OMEHOW Case stumbled forward. The procession stopped when he ordered it to, and he stood under the street-lamp gazing into faces that sickened him. He had to fight the wild impulse to turn and run.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Where do you come from?" Even Donohue would not have recognized his voice then.

"From the leper island just off the coast," the leader said. "They forced us to leave, shooting the guards and anyone who refused. They brought us here, turned us loose an hour ago. We didn't want to cause trouble. We came straight for the board of health.

Case's brain was shaking off the paralysis of fear. He knew that leprosy was only slightly contagious. These persons could walk through the city time and again and in all probability never cause a new case. But their effect on a town already half mad with fear would be tremendous. It was for this reason the outlaws had brought them from the colony seventy-five miles away.

"All right," Case said, "stay here. I'll round up some trucks and have you sent to the river. There'll be a boat there to carry you back to the island. And enough guards will go along to keep you from being troubled again."

It was easy to arrange for trucks and a boat. When he had finished, Knuckleduster Donohue took him by the elbow. "All right, Boss. It's getting close to midnight and you need sleep. You're going home willing, or I'm going to konk you one and take you."

"I'll go," Case said. "But I got to get up early. I got to find Bobby." Exhaust-

tion had squeezed his brain and he was scarcely conscious of what he said.

A man came rushing through the door of the drugstore in which Case had been telephoning. He grasped Case by the lapels and began to shout but Donohue flung him away. "Shut up, guy, whatever your news is. The boss is going home."

"But they've caught one of them!" the man yelled. Case recognized him now as one of his reporters. "A bunch of them raided the insane asylum. They turned all the nuts loose. Several thousand of 'em and four hundred and fifty homicidal maniacs! But one of the crooks was wounded and captured. They're taking him to headquarters now!"

White flame leaped through Alden Case. "We only need one!" he whispered. "We'll make him talk." He went sprinting out of the drugstore, heading for his automobile. Behind him lumbered Knuckleduster Donohue.

**G**OVERNOR GUNTER and Mayor Farson were in the commissioner's office when Case arrived. Both men had changed since that day in the state capitol. The governor no longer stomached his way around with pompous dignity. He slunk. The fat jowls which drooped over his collar trembled and his face was grey with fear. Two men who looked like deputy sheriffs, or gangsters, flopped in chairs near the wall. The governor had not been seen without them for the past week.

A different type of change had come over Mayor Farson. He was no longer the timid little man whose round face looked ridiculous between his big ears. He was almost gaunt now, and a stubble of beard covered his face. His right coat pocket hung heavy with an automatic and he carried a rifle. For the past week he'd seemed half mad, hunting the streets day

and night for the men who had mutilated his wife.

Only Commissioner Porter appeared unchanged, grey, hardfaced, determined. "Well," he said to Case, "I think it'll be over soon. They're bringing in one of the bandits. He's wounded, but not too badly." The commissioner's hands clinched with slow fury. "He'll talk," he said. "He'll talk."

"Who's bringing him?" Case asked. "The crooks may try to get him free."

"They don't know we have him. He was caught away from the others; so Sergeant McKenneth said when he phoned. They were too busy to miss him. He'll be here in a minute."

"You *must* force him to talk, Commissioner," Governor Gunter shouted. "I'll send the entire national guard to clean them out. This hellishness has got to stop!"

"He'll talk," Porter said.

Like an exclamation mark gunfire burst in the street below.

With one jump Alden Case hit the door and went through. Behind him, a Saint Bernard after a greyhound, came Donohue. At the front door men were milling, shouting. Gunfire ripped like jagged lightning. Head down Case drove through the crowd and into the street.

Men lay sprawled on the sidewalk. Some were wriggling, crying out. Others lay still. A block away a car was racing into darkness, a red stream of flame tagging it, the dwindling roar of a tommy-gun. Case's gun was in his hand and he fired twice, the boom of his shots lost in the blast of policemen's guns around him.

Two blocks away the car whirled a corner and was gone.

"He's dead," someone was saying. "They cut him in half with a machine gun. I reckon they were afraid he'd talk.

ALDEN CASE went lurching down the street with Knuckleduster Donohue close behind him. He felt sick with bitterness, and the fear, momentarily lifted by hope, crushed down on his brain again. "Maybe the bandits missed him," he muttered. "Maybe. And maybe somebody told them."

Donohue said, "Hell, Boss, nobody couldn'ta told 'em. How would they adone it?"

"How do I know?" He stopped short, his eyes wide. It was hard to think with every muscle in his body aching from exhaustion. He said softly, "Maybe it'll work."

"Nothing's gona work for you but sleep," Donohue said. "I'm taking you home wheter you like it or not."

"Sure, Ill go. But I want to call the paper first." He talked for some time and there was a faint gleam in his sunken eyes when he left the booth. "They've started their campaign to get money," he told Donohue. "They staged mass raids on at least three stores tonight. They lost five men and carried away others who were wounded. Even if my idea doesn't work, one of the bandits will be caught alive sooner or later."

But in the meantime . . . ? Case tried to shut the thought out of his aching brain. What had happened to Bobby Ellis? Was she still alive, and if so why had she been saved? He thought of the lustful eyes of John Derlington as the outlaw had looked at her. And the thought of Marion Farson, mad with pain, bloody froth coming from her mouth, her body covered with sores.

And somewhere, Bobby Ellis. Alive? Dead? He was afraid to guess.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Death That Crawls

THERE is a physical limit to which the body may be driven. Alden Case could never remember taking off his coat and tie. And only vaguely he heard his shoes fall, felt the soft giving of the bed as he lay back upon it.

Actually he slept for three hours, though it seemed that his eyes had not completely closed. Then he was awake without understanding why. His first emotion was a dull resentment against consciousness and the pain it brought him. And all at once he was afraid.

To the right of his bed was a window, and through it—a pale and yellow green—came the light of a waning moon. One dim shaft of it touched his bed, and in this the face seemed to hang suspended. It was a long, thin face with nostrils dreadfully dilated, a mouth that was a twisted and sinister hole, eyes that were yellow flame. The face was not more than twelve inches from Case's, but between them was the man's hand. It held a snake, gripping it just back of the head! The tongue flickered so close to Case that if he had moved the fangs would have struck between his eyes!

"Alden Case," the man said. "Are you awake? Yes, I see you are." He chuckled, a sound somehow like the hiss of the snake.

Case looked at the snarled mouth and the eyes that glowed even in the semi-dark. Before he recognized the man he knew that he was insane, a murdering maniac freed from the asylum.

"They gave me this snake to kill you with," the man chuckled. "They put a bit of something extra on his fangs to make certain, but that wasn't necessary. It's a moccasin and he's going to hit you right between the eyes, not below the belt the way you hit me."

It was then Case recognized him. Martin Halliday, whose dreams of a crooked financial empire Case had exposed and broken. Probably the man had always been half insane, but after his plans crashed he had gone raving mad.

Case's voice was almost too husky for understanding. "You think I ruined you, Halliday, but I didn't. I was really in favor of you. I'm willing to back you now with my whole fortune."

The man laughed so that the hand holding the snake shook, bringing it nearer Case's face. "You think I'm insane," he said. "Well, sure I'm insane. I've got sense enough to know that. I killed two people before they locked me up; persons I had no grudge against except that they reminded me of you. It was always you I wanted to kill. And now I'm going to do it." The snake came so close to Case's eyes were crossed in watching it. There was not room for a man to slide his hand between the flickering tongue and Case's nostrils.

"Why don't you move, Alden Case?" Halliday asked. "Why don't you scream? I want to jam him down your mouth while you're yelling."

TWICE Case tried to speak, but the muscles of his throat had knotted. The odor of the snake had clogged his nostrils and he could not breathe. He had the sensation that his eyes were popping from their sockets, moving closer to the snake, and he couldn't stop them.

It was more feeling than sight that told him the darkness beyond Halliday had moved. He could see nothing, yet he knew the door was opening. He knew that Knuckleduster Donohue was sliding into the room.

"All right," Halliday snarled, "tell me you've always been my friend! Think to yourself, 'This man's insane. I'll talk him out of killing me.' Try that, Case, because

I want to hear you beg. I hate your guts, man, and if it's the last thing I do, you'll die."

Still Case could not see Donohue. He didn't dare look, though he knew the big man was in the room. And he knew also what was going to happen. From where he was Donohue couldn't see the snake; he'd merely slam his fist against the face floating in the moonlight. Halliday would be knocked out, but the snake, less than an inch from Case's eyes, would strike.

"Come on," Halliday said, "beg for your life."

Case felt as if his lungs were bursting, his strength oozing out of him with thick sweat. "I don't mind you killing me," he said at last. "Not even with that snake you're holding before my eyes, a snake a man standing behind you couldn't see!" He wondered if Donohue would be able to understand the words that stuck in his throat as he tried to speak them.

Halliday's snarl was half a scream. "You're not afraid of snakes, huh! Maybe you're not afraid of the whole zoo that's going to be let loose on this city! You're lying! *Lying!*"

From the darkness a voice said, "He's not lying. He loves snakes."

Halliday shrieked and whirled. Case saw Donohue's body smashing down. Then he had twisted, flinging himself headlong from the bed. A chair crashed over. A man screamed, time and again, the sound horrible in the darkness. A heavy body struck the floor.

Case got the light on and turned. The first thing he saw was the snake, midway the floor, head raised. Knuckleduster Donohue lay some two feet away, his body twitching. Case's outstretched hand touched a chair and he flung it. It hit the snake just below the head. The reptile jerked and writhed and Case smashed it with another chair.

Near the left wall Martin Halliday lay

knotted upon the floor. His mouth was open and long gurgling cries rolled from it. Case could see the twin marks of fangs on the right cheek and even as he watched, Halliday ceased to twist. The cries bubbled softly in his throat, and stopped. Whatever poison had been added to that of the snake worked swiftly.

It seemed to Case that the floor stretched like a rubber band as he went toward Donohue. It took minutes to cross the room and kneel above the big man; all his strength was necessary to roll him over.

Donohue's face was scarlet. His eyes, almost closed, showed only a narrow strip of white. "Knuckleduster," Case said. "Knuckleduster, what the hell's wrong?" The big man did not move.

Case thought the light blinked out because he could not see plainly. Then he knew there were tears in his eyes. He tried to wipe them away. "Knuckleduster," he said again, but now he did not expect his friend to answer. "He purposely got Halliday to turn away from me," Case said through stiff lips. "He got himself killed to save me."

The room turned with a slow surge to right and left. Red fires flickered through it, stabbing into Case's brain. He tried to stand up and staggered. For the first time he realized that more than grief and the backwash of fear tortured him. Either he had contracted some disease or had been poisoned. Perhaps the snake had struck him after killing the other two and emptying his fangs of most of their venom. Whatever the cause, a fever tangled his brain and he could not think clearly. But there was something he had to think about, something of terrific importance. He strained, like a man tugging at a great weight, but could not remember . . . .

**T**HEN, strangely, the pain went out of his head. His brain seemed to have the brilliant clearness of a glass ball. Thoughts danced in it, and he saw them as he had seen whirling midges within a test tube. He saw the thing he had been trying to remember: Halliday saying, "Maybe you're not afraid of the whole zoo that's going to be let loose upon the city." Halliday had talked to Derlington and his killers. They had given him the snake. He must have heard them plan to release the tigers, reptiles, lions and other animals to roam the streets and spread terror.

Case jerked at his watch. A quarter after four. It would be daylight within another half hour but now the darkness was thickest. Perhaps the animals were already released, but if not and he went to the zoo, there might be a chance to capture one of the outlaws—one of men responsible for Donohue's death, for whatever ghastly horror had happened to Bobby Ellis!

The need for frantic haste drove him rushing out of the room, caused him to forget his shoes, his automatic. In the glass-clear shell of his brain he wondered if he should call the police and warn them. He considered the idea, and tossed it aside. It would take too long, he thought. And the converging of police at the zoo might frighten away the killers. Besides, this was a personal fight with him now. He'd mop up the whole damn bunch alone. So it seemed to his fever-twisted brain.

When the fever cleared he was standing against a tree in one of the darkest parts of the park. He left the tree, moving cautiously toward another, although he did not know at first what he feared. Then, abruptly, he understood.

Not forty feet ahead one of the park lights dropped its inverted funnel of brightness, and through this a man was moving. He carried a rifle whose muzzle

bulged into the dark cylinder of a silencer. "So that," Case thought, "is how they manage to kill the park guards and work quietly."

The man stopped at the edge of one of the drives which coiled through the park. Probably the other bandits were to meet him here, Case thought. His breath caught hard in his chest. His body rigid, lifted on its toes, he went forward. Three, two more steps now . . . .

Something round and hard jabbed his spine. A voice said, "All right, Buddy, who are you?"

Case whirled, a cry of frustration and anger jerking at his lips. He could scarcely see the man who faced him, holding a silenced rifle, but he needed only a glimpse of that squared jaw and crooked mouth to know that here was another of the killers.

"Well, well," the man said. "Who's this guy slipping up on you, Pete?"

The bandit Case had stalked came close and peered in the publisher's face. "Be damned if I know."

"He's not a park guard," the other said. "Probably some smart guy trying to be a hero. Well, he asked for it and here it is." The man's finger tightened on the trigger. He was a full ten feet away, impossible to reach before the bullets would crash into Case's chest. The other bandit flanked him on the right. There wasn't a chance and in the queerly crystal globe of his brain Case knew it.

They were going to kill him. It was all over.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Where the Dead Walk*

**A**T FIRST Case didn't know where the sound was coming from. He heard it, forming in the air before him, a thin, insane chuckle. Then he knew that he

was laughing. "Shoot!" he cried. "Shoot, and the Lord shall hurl thy bullets back into thy face! The fiends of hell shall shriek about thee in the night, and feast upon thy soul!"

"Huh?" the man said. He took a half step backward, his finger still tight upon the trigger.

"Shoot!" Case yelled again. "For I shall kill thee whether I be alive or dead, mangle thy body and eat at thy heart!"

The bandit to his right laughed a bit uncertainly. "It's one of them lunatics," he said. "A happy guy, ain't he."

"Whatta we do with him?" the other asked. "Burn him?"

Somewhere in the darkness a motor sounded, the low whir of tires. "They're coming," the second bandit said. "Let this guy go. He'll pull the fear of God in folks round this burg, and that's what the chief wants."

"Okay. Scram!" The man waved his gun muzzle.

It was then the fever came down on Case again, blinding his conscious mind, jabbing red needles through his eyeballs, burning his flesh until he expected it to crack. He had a vague impression of reeling under trees, of seeing an automobile, hearing voices. He was running, swiftly, furiously without knowing why. Air hammered against his face. He was the tail of a kite, whirled with incredible speed through the darkness, while he clung desperately to a round bar stretched across heaven.

He came back to a wavering earth that rushed under him, an earth dotted with white, grotesque things that were somehow fearful beyond description. They were graves, tombstones rising and twisting against the darkness.

The darkness exploded into light.

Strangely now the fever cleared from his mind, leaving it like a machine held up in front of him so that he could watch

the mechanism working beyond crystal walls.

He had clung to the spare tires of the outlaws' automobile and gone with them to their hideout: a mausoleum in the middle of the cemetery! No wonder all effort to locate it had been futile!

There were men standing all around Case when his mind cleared. Most of them carried rifles and their characters were cut upon their faces with cruel lines. He recognized the gunman he'd seen in the park.

"Great God!" the man said. "He musta hung on the spare tire!"

A dozen rifles centered on Case. Behind him the wall of the mausoleum had closed, shutting him off from the outside world as completely as it would have a corpse placed here and forgotten.

In the clear globe of his brain Case saw the bandits and the death that was in their faces. And he saw also that he had failed. Donohue's death would go unavenged. Bobby. . . . Pain flared through him as he thought of her. Even if she were alive there'd be no chance of saving her now. Either they would torture and kill her, or . . . .

They were going to kill him now, and he was glad. He couldn't have lived, knowing absolutely that he had failed. He was going to die now before he had the final horror of learning what had happened to Bobby, and he was thankful.

The man named Pete who had ordered his release in the park said, "Hell, don't shoot the guy before the chief sees him. He may not be the nut I thought he was. And if you do shoot him, what the hell you gona do with the body?"

"Chunk it out," someone said.

"Yeah, and have folks start prowling around here. Bring him on to the chief."



**M**EN gathered on either side of Case and he began to move forward. He realized then that he was not in the mausoleum proper, but below it in what must have been an ancient sewer abandoned years ago. Dim tapers flared along the walls, giving a wavering yellow light. Now and then voices sounded from curtained recesses which must have been where other tunnels had led into this one, and were transformed now into rooms.

The passage ended abruptly where two men stood guard before a black-curtained door. Pete said, "We got a guy the chief might want to see. He hung on the back of our automobile and rode in with us."

"Okay," the guard said. "But the real boss is in there now. You'll probably have to wait." He pushed aside the black curtain, the door beyond it, and vanished.

Case sucked a deep breath into his lungs as fury surged through him. So there was another boss, an outside man! A man whose brain had cooked up this whole, hellish scheme. A single man responsible for all the horror that had swept the city, for Donohue's death—for whatever had happened to Bobby Ellis! *And that man was close to him now!*

He tried to make his face calm, his voice steady as he asked, "Who is the real boss?"

"Be damned if I know," Pete said. "Maybe even Derlington don't know, but there ain't nobody else that does. He's a big shot, whoever he is. Always wears a mask when he comes here."

Case could feel the breath in his lungs congealing iron hard. It didn't matter who the fellow was. He was going to kill him!

The curtain swayed again as the guard came through. "Okay," he said. "Take him in."

Case waited for no more orders. He flung the curtain aside. The door beyond it was open. He went over the sill.

And then he stopped short, staring at a room such as he had never seen before. The whole thing, ceiling, walls, and floor, was covered with curtains of such intense black that it seemed to soak up the yellow flare of three tapers hung from the ceiling, leaving the place half filled with an eerie and amber light.

It was a huge place, and he had to turn slightly to look at all the instruments scattered about it. And when he saw them his heart was suddenly wrenched in his chest with pain. Sickness struck at his stomach and he wavered, one hand coming up claw-like before his face. It was a torture room that might have come out of some medieval castle or some dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition! The rack, for breaking and twisting bodies, the boot for crushing a human foot into pulp, the brazier of glowing coals heating irons for torture. Shadowed and vague and horrible they stood about the room.

Near the far wall, with the yellow glow of a torch falling across them, two men sat in huge chairs. The light flickered on the lean, sadistic face, the twisted mouth and insane eyes of John Derlington, but the other wore a black mask and a robe that covered him to his feet. His eyes glowed beyond the mask.

It was Derlington who spoke. "Well I'll be damned!" he said. "Our friend the newspaper publisher. What can we do for you?" Some trick of the acoustics made the voice seem to come from every direction, so that it pounded against Case's ears for seconds after the man had ceased speaking.

Case said, "Nothing. Nothing that you want to do." He started across the room, circling slowly toward the brazier of coals and the irons that were

heating within it. He knew they were going to kill him and it would be best to force them to do it swiftly, to avoid the unbearable torture they would put on him otherwise. But before he died, he wanted to kill that man under the hood. There was no longer any hope of saving Bobby, even if she were alive. He had only one wish now, to kill the fiend responsible for these horrors!

**T**HE man began to chuckle, the sound evil and deathly as it beat back from all the walls together, rolling into a symphony of hate. "So you came here," he said, his voice muffled and hollow. "That was more than I could hope for."

"You wanted me?" Case asked. He was within two yards of the brazier now. He could see the heavy, red-hot pinchers, the fiery branding iron. But he dared not let his gaze rest on them.

The hooded man chuckled again. "When I learned they'd sent somebody to kill you I was furious. I wanted the pleasure of that myself. It'll take you a long time to die, the way I want you to."

Case said softly, "It won't take you so long." He leaped. His right hand grasped the heavy end of the pinchers and swung them high. His snarl was like that of an animal as he drove headlong at the hooded man.

He had forgotten the guards who had entered with him. He never heard the shot, but the bullet caught him in the right shoulder, knocking him sideways. He could feel his fingers stiffening around the pinchers as he tried to swing them down, but his arm would not work. Then he went over on his face, hard.

His last sensation was not of pain in his shoulder, but of stabbing lights behind his eyes. Exertion had brought the fever on him again. His head burst into red flame that was snuffed out suddenly, leaving darkness.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A Chamber in Hell

**T**HE voice, rolling hollow from wall to wall, said, "Ah, he's about conscious now. Pull him up." Something lifted Case's arms and jagged agony hurtled through his body. He heard the thin, pain-torn scream that cut off suddenly without knowing that he had cried out. Then he fainted for a second time.

As consciousness came back to him he was aware only of the torture that racked him. He writhed, moaning insensibly for long moments before his eyes were open, his brain clear enough for him to see and understand.

He was suspended by his wrists from the roof, his feet barely off the floor. A thin leather pad circled his wrists so that the wire holding him did not cut into the flesh, but the pain jabbing down through his wounded shoulder was almost unbearable. He was naked from the waist up, and his back touched against one curtained wall of the room. To right and left of him were men with the faces of medieval torturers. Across the room sat Derlington and the masked man.

"I hate you, Alden Case," the masked man said. "God! How I loathe you. This is my revenge, and I'm going to enjoy it. Besides, it will serve as an example to the others I warned what to expect if they keep fighting me. We've used this room to persuade several rich men to contribute funds, now we'll use it on you for a different purpose." He paused, and again the queer acoustics of the room rumbled under laughter.

"That friend of yours," he went on, "Bobby Ellis, has been most persistent in refusing to make love to Derlington. He's taken quite a fancy to her, but she continues to object. I think that if she watches what we are going to do to you,

she'll change her mind. Women are quite sacrificing, they tell me."

A thousand emotions stormed through Case, drowning out the agony of his wounded shoulder. Bobby was alive! They hadn't killed her, hadn't tortured her! He was glad that Derlington wanted her, since that meant she wouldn't be hurt . . . . And he was wracked by knowledge of what was going to happen to her!

"Listen," he said huskily, "let her go. I've got a lot of money and I'll give it all to you. Every nickle, every bit of property. But let . . . ."

Derlington said, "We'll get your damn property anyway. And if we don't we'll get enough without it. I want the woman."

"Damn you!" Case said. "Damn you, I . . . ." But the words choked in his throat. He was helpless, and knew it.

One curtain swung back and the guard came into the room leading Bobby Ellis. Her face was pale in the yellow glow of the torches and her dark hair swung loose about her face. But her head was held erect, her small chin firm. For one moment she stood there; then she turned slightly and saw Case.

A hoarse cry broke from her throat. She leaped forward and the guard caught her, jerking her back against him. "Alden!" she whispered, and after that she was quiet.

"You've been so stubborn about making love to my friend," the muffled voice said, "that I want to show you how we are treating your other lover. Perhaps then you'll change your mind."

He stood up and went to a shadowed corner of the room. When he came back into the light he was holding a large glass bottle. Case could see something move in it, dim and horrible. That first sight of the things sickened him, sent cold terror deep into his belly.

"These are scorpions," the hooded man

said. "I'm going to put them on the curtain against Mr. Case's back. When he hangs straight down the wires won't cut his wrists because of the leather pads. But when he hangs straight down his back touches the curtain and the scorpions. They won't kill him, not with their first few stings anyway. But they'll make him try to swing away from the curtain, and when he does the wire will slip from the pads about his wrists. Really, it's a most ingenious form of torture." He crossed the room toward Case.

"Stop!" Bobby shouted. "Don't! Don't! I'll do anything you want! Don't torture him!"

**T**HE hooded man paused, chuckling. And all the while Case cursed him, telling him to bring his scorpions, cursed him with words that seared his throat. He cursed the girl, shouting at her to keep quiet, begging her to let them kill him.

"Oh we'll look after you first," the hooded man said. "Perhaps Miss Ellis is willing to cooperate now, but she'll be more willing after she's watched awhile." He came close, uncorking the bottle cautiously. He touched it to the curtain at Case's shoulders.

Case tried to twist his head to watch, but couldn't. And then a scorpion struck! It was as though a white-hot fishhook had been jabbed into his spine, wrenched and torn free. He screamed, hearing the sound rip at his vocal chords. His heels kicked hard against the curtained wall as he tried to fight himself away from it.

He swung outward and when he did the wire slid from the leather pads around his wrists. It was fine wire, and under the weight of his body it slashed into his flesh like knives. He felt it grind upon the bone and then blood came in a slow smear down both his arms. He shrieked and kicked, writhing like an injured snake. And the wire cut deeper.

Somehow he forced himself to hang motionless, to let his body swing back against the curtain. A scorpion bit at his left shoulder, another low and in the middle of his back. But the only sound now was the grinding of Case's teeth as he hung motionless. Sweat had come out on his body as thick as the blood which streamed down his arms and back.

"Stop!" Bobby Ellis cried. "I'll do anything. Don't torture him any longer."

John Derlington stood up. His thin face was twisted with lust, yellow in the torches glow. He stepped to the girl. His eyes burned, his mouth twisted so that a thin drool of saliva came from the corner. "All right?" he asked.

She did not look at him. "Anything," she whispered.

He reached out, bracing her with his left hand, catching the throat of her dress with his right. He jerked and she would have fallen if he had not held her. The dress ripped free. She stood there, head bowed, wearing only a thin slip.

Derlington laughed. He caught the slip in his right hand and ripped it. In the yellow glow of the torches Bobby Ellis stood naked.

"Look," the hooded man said close to Case's ear. "You love that girl. Look at her now, and I hope the sight drives you insane."

The yellow light flickered on high, round breasts, on the slim legs flowering into curved hips. She stood rigid, waiting. John Derlington lifted her in his arms, his head bent toward hers. His vulture's face pressed cold lips upon her trembling ones—but she did not resist, did not draw back. Case's voice returned, at that, and he roared curses and maledictions until the place resounded as with the cries of the damned in hell. And then, as though in answer to his profane prayers, the whole end of the room seemed to burst open to admit a group of shouting men.

There was the sharp crack of gunfire as the exultant, raging mob poured in, and in the lead, roaring like a maddened bull, was Knuckleduster Donohue.

Knuckleduster didn't carry a gun. He leaped at Derlington as the bandit dropped Bobby, and his hand flashed under his coat. Then Donohue's fist caught him on the chin with all the man's two hundred pounds driving behind it. Derlington came off the floor as though he had been exploded, and there was the crack of bone snapping.

Case kicked at the wall, flinging his body far out. The wire slashed into his hands, but his feet came up chest high. He kicked. He felt the impact of his heels upon the masked man's head, but the torture that shot through his wrist and shoulder was unbearable. The room burst into a whirling red haze of pain. Then there was darkness.

ALDEN CASE looked down at his bandaged wrists and grinned. "I'd given up hope that the boys would ever locate the hideout," he said. "I wasn't even sure my idea was any good."

"How did you tell them where it was?" Bobby asked. "How did you know before you got there?"

"I didn't. But after that man was killed in front of the police station, I figured there must be a telephone in their hideout because somebody had warned them about one of their men being captured. So I sent about forty persons from my paper to the telephone company. Under the circumstances the company was willing to help, and every number, especially the unlisted ones, was checked against the city directory. The number would have to be in some fake name, of course. They checked on all telephones they couldn't find in the city directory. Good luck helped. This phone was registered against a vacant house close to the cemetery. A

couple of cars abandoned by the bandits had been found nearby, and calls had come from the house although it appeared to be vacant. The basement connected with those ancient sewers that ran under the cemetery."

Knuckleduster Donohue said, "Damn if you ain't a smart man, Boss. But I don't see how you figured it was Mayor Farson back of that gang, even after he knocked off his wife."

"I didn't do that alone either," Case said. "I didn't really know it was Farson until they'd pulled the mask off him. And one of my gossip columnists has figured out why he killed his wife. He'd fallen for some actress, who demanded more money than he had to give her. But the man was a criminal lunatic with delusions of grandeur. He actually dreamed of becoming dictator of the nation through a reign of terror. Of course, he had no trouble getting the aid of crooks like Derlington. Women," he added, grinning at Bobby, "are the cause of all trouble."

Minutes later Donohue said, "I reckon maybe I better go. This is gettin' intimate."

"Not before you explain something," Case said. "I left you for a dead man, and a few hours later you came bursting in knocking the head off the world's number one public enemy."

"Aw," Donohue said and grinned sheepishly, "I just had the yellow fever, the doc says. Then when you and me went home I drank a lot of water. The water main had been tapped and poisoned. That was what got you, but I'd drunk the most. I knocked that nut Halliday out, and then . . . ." His face turned a fiery red with embarrassment. "Aw, well I, er, I musta fainted."

Case laughed. "I thought the snake had bitten you."

Donohue said, "You had to kill him, didn't you? Well, he'da been dead before that, if he bit me."

Case sobered suddenly. "There's much work yet to be done," he said. "This city has become a pest hole, a mad house, a fenceless zoo of maddened beasts. You must go away, Bobby, until we get it cleaned up—"

A soft hand over his mouth interrupted him. "You have proven that you are a man," she said. "Are you going to rob me of the opportunity of proving I am worthy of you?"

Knuckleduster Donohue turned ponderously toward the door. "Like, I said," he mumbled, "this's gettin' too intimate—"

But the real reason he turned away was to hide a suspicious moisture which had suddenly accumulated in his eyes . . . .

**THE END**


Edward Lawton, powerless to move, was forced to watch his lovely sweetheart, nude, bow in supplication to a lecherous creature whose power could split asunder the world itself, in



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**TERROR TALES**

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**16 More Pages**

Cavalry threading through desert hills, the clamor of the charge—and something more, something that will put a lump in a soldier's throat and make this novelette stand long in memory. That's—"The Last Maneuvers," by Charles L. Clifford. Also "The Devil Is Dead," by H. Bedford-Jones; A Young Hardesty story by H. H. Knibbs; stories by Richard Howells Watkins, Sewell Peaslee Wright and others.



**Adventure** 15c



# HIS AVENGING MUSE

By Emerson Graves

(Author of "Terror From the Deep," etc.)

*Cleve Harrison found his artist's hand gaining steadily in ability, his paintings becoming the products of real genius. Yet his mind and soul were being enslaved to a seductive being whose form was that of a beautiful woman—but whose heart was black with centuries of sin. . . .*



**I** DON'T blame you for thinking I am mad. I thought Bill Hargate was, as did the rest of the world. And for the same reason. Crazy as hell, I said he was. But now . . . .

Hargate, as you know, was a sculptor. A good one, too. So good that he made a living at it; though for a long while he couldn't get started. That was a funny thing, too. For years he worked in the

cheap attic for which he sometimes owed ten months' rent, and couldn't sell his stuff. Then, all of a sudden, he began to be a success. There was a sharp line—one day he was unsuccessful, the next day he was made.

I remember the time of that division. We were in Clancy's bar. Bill, big and red-haired and muscular, stared at me with blue eyes burning frostily from something more than whiskey.

"I'm through with failure, Cleve," he said abruptly. "I'm going to be famous now."

"That's nice," I said. "How do you know? Did somebody read your tea leaves—or your beer suds?"

"No," he said, so seriously that I got my first clear doubt as to his mental balance, "I've got a muse now."

"You've got a what?"

"A muse."

"What the devil is a muse?"

"Inspiration. A sort of guiding spirit every creative artist must have."

Well, I thought he'd gone batty over the blah you hear at artistic receptions, where people who aren't artists try to talk the language of those who are. Inspiring muse—creative genius—Nuts!

"Have another drink," I said.

Bill grinned, and the grin was so sane that my opinion of his craziness wavered for a minute. But only for a minute.

"It sounds screwy, doesn't it?" he said. "But I mean it. There's something with me today that I didn't have yesterday. Some sort of spirit, or guiding hand. . . ." His eyes lost themselves in distance beyond the barroom wall.

"So you've got a muse now," I said. "That's swell. Something to inspire you to the heights. How do you get 'em? I can use one in my commercial art. Do you advertise for 'em?"

Bill's blue eyes turned somberly on me. "Don't be a damned fool," he said.

"What would your muse be like?" I persisted. "A woman, of course?"

"I think so," Hargate said slowly, and seriously. "Yes, it would be a woman, wouldn't it? A beautiful woman. But not as we know women. A sort of woman—*thing*. . . ."

"Hargate's Muse," I said. "Where will you keep it? Will you build a kind of ethereal dog-house—"

He banged his fist on the table, and he was angry.

"Come up to my room," he said. "I'm telling you, there's something in my life, something so tangible that I can almost see it, that wasn't there before. And I can show it to you in my work. I finished the Capri nude this afternoon."

I whistled. That in itself was an astonishing thing. For two years Bill had left this one figure, a nude about three-quarter life size, unfinished because he was afraid of ruining a brilliant start—afraid of his own lack of ability. Now, in an afternoon, he had completed it.

**B**UT that astonishment faded into a deeper one when I got to Bill's attic with him and he switched on the unshaded light bulb over the completed statue.

God, it was lovely! A female figure, seated on a rock, half turned so that the face looked around at you over one smooth shoulder. It was so perfect that it seemed to breathe; modeled with swift, sure lines; one of the great statues of the world.

"Say, Bill, that's immense," I said, in a hushed tone. "I'm a commercial hack, but I know good work when I see it."

Hargate nodded, almost without emotion. "Never saw me work like that before, did you? I never did before—it's the new thing that's come into my life that is responsible. Muse—that's the only thing I know to call it."

A slightly drunk artist, and a slightly drunk sculptor, standing and staring at that sculptor's work. And knowing it was great. . . .

It sold for four thousand dollars next day. And that ended Hargate's obscurity and poverty. Muse or not, something had got into him that made him turn out work that was outstanding in our day. But you all know that. You've read the papers.

What you don't know is Bill's personal life during that brief flash of fame. No one knows that but I. And I've never told, till now.

He came to my studio one afternoon. I was turning out some black-and-whites, for a distillery advertisement. I hadn't seen him for weeks, and I was shocked at his appearance.

He had lost weight, so that his heavy bones seemed to stick out through the flesh. His face was lined and sallow. His clear, frosty blue eyes were muddy and ringed.

They'd told me he was drinking heavily. They'd said he had quarrelled with the girl he was going to marry, and lately had been living almost like a hermit in the attic he still kept. In fact, several of the gang had said they thought he was going mad.

I put it more simply, when I saw him. I told myself that success had gone to his head, ruined him as it does so many men who can stand adversity but not prosperity. And then he came out with that silly muse business again.

"Cleve, it's driving me insane," he said abruptly.

"What is?" I said, deciding it was best not to comment on the change in him, but to act as if he were normal.

"My muse."

"Why don't you trade it in on a new model, if it's unsatisfactory?" I said, finishing a sketch and lighting a cigarette.

I thought for a minute he was going

to cry—that big hulk of a guy who could break most men in two.

"For God's sake, don't be flippant! I've got to talk this out with somebody."

"Okay," I said in a changed tone. "Talk it out with me."

So he did. And it was a crazy talk.

He had been sure that night at Claney's bar that something almost tangible had entered his life and breathed the spirit of great art into his work. He became more sure of it as the weeks passed; and he began to get a clear idea of just what it was.

His first surmise that it was a woman—"a woman-thing"—was correct.

"She's tall and exquisitely slender. She has greenish eyes like the eyes of Egyptian priestesses. And red hair. If you think my hair is red—it's sand-colored compared to hers."

"But you told me you'd never seen it—her," I objected. "And Egyptian priestesses are supposed to have had brown eyes."

He ignored the remark about priestesses. "I *haven't* seen her. Yet I seem to know just what she looks like. Down to the last detail. It comes out in my work."

I stopped a moment at that. I had followed his recent things. All nude female figures. All apparently the same figure.

"You mean the figure you've modeled—"

"In all of my recent work," he nodded. "That's she. That's a portrait in stone of the *thing* now in my life."

"Your muse." I said, starting to kid him again. But I stopped at the look in his eyes.

"Bill," I said, "let's face this thing. You have a curious obsession. Not a . . . sane one. You've picked up the delusion that some spirit, or thing of another world, or whatever you want to call it, has suddenly become your companion. Under that delusion you're doing grand



work—and drinking yourself to death! Can't you keep the new artistic power that's come to you—and can the bad part of the delusion?"

I've never seen such misery as came into his face, then.

"I'd willingly give up the artistic power if I could give up the *thing* too," he said in a low voice. "But I can't. She—she's in my life forever. Though that won't be long. She'll kill me soon."

HE paced up and down my studio, pulling at his knuckles.

"They're beginning to whisper that I'm crazy. Well, maybe I am. It would be a wonder if I wasn't . . . Cleve, she has taken possession of my life like a jealous hag married to a young husband! She is with me constantly. She won't let me have a close friend, or another woman. You heard I'd quarrelled with Marjorie, and our engagement is off?"

I nodded, wordless.

"It's because of—*her*. She got jealous of Marjorie, just as though she were human herself. Did you see Marjorie's throat?"

I nodded again.

"But I'll bet Marjorie didn't tell you, or any one else, how she got that deep slash, that'll leave a scar till she dies!" Hargate began pacing again. "*She* did that to Marjorie. The *thing* I called my muse and was happy at having—for a little while. I don't know whether *she* slashed her with some sort of weapon or not. Maybe *she* has claws, like a cat. A great cat, from hell."

"For the love of heaven, Bill—"

"So you think I'm crazy too," he interrupted. He was silent for several minutes. Then he smiled. His eyes were normal again. "All right, I am. Forget the whole thing. Come on out and have dinner with me. Afterwards we'll go to Austin's party. I'm going to get drunk,

and I'm going to raise hell with a good looking model, if there are any around loose. *She* can get as sore as she likes about it."

Well, you've read in the papers about that studio party of Tom Austin's, too. You've read of the horror that ended it. But I had no premonition of it, then. I was only concerned with trying to talk to Bill Hargate as if nothing had happened—above all, trying to get to the roots of the strange obsession that haunted him.

But he only mentioned it once more before we went to Austin's.

"I'm going to have some fun if I die for it. And I may die, at that. *She* wants all of me. Rule or ruin. *All* of me. But then the muse is always spoken of as a jealous muse, isn't she?" He laughed in a way I didn't like. And then we were at Austin's.

It was quite a party. There were a dozen or fifteen artists and writers there. And more than that number of girls; most of them professional models. Bill Hargate started right in having his fun. I saw him drink four straight whiskeys, and make for a tall girl with orange-red hair and grey eyes that returned his bold and burning stare with never a sign of abashment. And then I found a friend myself, and had a few drinks, and began having my own fun. I lost sight of Bill till about midnight. Then he came over to me with the beautiful tall girl clinging to his arm.

"I'm giving *her* hell," Bill said, thickly. "*She* is jealous. Furious. I think it's because my friend," he grinned at the girl, "has red hair too."

"He's nuts," said the girl, squeezing Bill's arm, speaking in a throaty, languorous tone, "but I like him anyway."

"She doesn't know about *her*," Bill said to me. "I haven't told any one else about *her* but you."

"Do you often get like this, big boy?"

laughed the model. She turned to me. "He acts like somebody else was with us. And I hope he's wrong—because what went on between us in Austin's little den, with the door locked, is nobody's business!"

She laughed again, in a slightly unsteady way, and hauled him away from me. I saw the two of them head for that little den again, walking with the extra precision of folks who are tipsy. And then I forgot them both—till midnight came and went.

**T**WENTY minutes after twelve. You've seen that time quoted as the moment of the tragedy. But it can never be real in your minds because you weren't there in Austin's rooms. . . .

The first thing I heard, that we all heard, was a scream. I won't forget that sound in a hurry. It was the ultimate distillation of horror, wrung from a woman's tortured mouth. And then the tall model came running from the little den with the never-ending, awful scream still pouring from her lips.

She was scratched and slashed as if she had forced her way through a thorn bush. Her face was chalk-white and her eyes saw nothing. They glared at and through us. And to that unseen horror which she seemed to glimpse beyond us, she muttered hoarsely:

*"He's dead!"*

A moment she swayed there, just outside the door of the den, and then she fell full length on the floor.

None of us was tipsy any more. We were sober now. Men and girls scrambled to help her. But I went on into the den with her dreadful words hammering on my brain. And if I won't forget the model's scream in a hurry, I won't forget the sight that met my eyes in the den, either.

It was a tiny library, walled with books, with a table and chair and divan in it. Some of the books were out of the shelves, now; the table-lamp was tipped on its side but still burning. And on the floor was Bill.

His throat was slashed as though a maddened giant had swung a cleaver at it. And from the gash, as if from a second, dreadful mouth, came slow spurts of life-blood.

I bent over him. He was, incredibly, still alive. His eyes moved. They stared into mine with a sort of gladness, a sort of peace in them. As if this death of his were cherished escape.

And then, suddenly, even as they were glazing in death, they changed expression. Horror crept into them—and they were no longer staring at my face. They were glaring at something a little behind me and to my right!

I whirled around. There was nothing there but wall, with disarranged bookshelves. And when I turned back to Bill, he was dead.

"My God!" came the shocked tones of Austin, from the doorway. "What an awful accident! He fell on that bottle, and it broke under him and slashed his throat!"

Only then did I see the thing clasped in Bill's hand and half-hidden under his chest: a bottle-neck with jagged glass edges like so many razors. . . .

The police came. They questioned us. All we could tell them was that Bill and the girl had gone into the den, and that then the girl had burst out screaming that Bill was dead. They tried to question the girl. But they were unsuccessful, there. No one will ever know what she saw in the den, or how she got the slashes on her bared shoulders and breast. When she came out of her faint she was incurably mad. She still is; a beautiful lunatic in the state asylum.

DAWN was reddening the sky as I got to my studio. I could hardly drag myself up the stairs and into it. There, I half fell into a chair before my drawing board, so utterly worn out that I couldn't think. I could hardly see; but abstractedly I did notice the sketch on my board—the last of the black-and-whites for the distillery ads.

Mechanically my hand picked up a brush. There in the dawn, with at first scarcely enough light to see what I was doing, I finished the sketch. . . .

And only then realized the complete incredibility of what I had done!

So exhausted that I could hardly feel my fingers, let alone guide them—temporarily I was only a shell of a person from the shock of Bill's death, and the liquor that had died in me—yet I had worked steadily and well for over two hours, finishing that sketch!

But I was too exhausted even to wonder for very long. I fell into bed and slept like a dead person. . . .

I woke with the words, "Hello, who's there?" on my lips.

For a moment I stared bewilderedly around. It was about two in the afternoon. The sun slanted in my skylight. And it revealed—no one in the big studio room but myself. It was odd. I'd waked out of a sound sleep with a distinct impression that some one was there with me.

I went out for lunch. Bill's ghost was with me. I kept remembering the slash across his throat. The broken bottle, of course! As Austin had surmised, and the police had finally written down, Bill had fallen with a bottle in his hand, and it had broken and cut his throat.

His crazy words to me: "*She* is furious. . . . *She'll* kill me soon. . . ." I dismissed them. And I tried to dismiss his dying look—his glaring at something unseen to me that was behind me and a little to the right. Had there been warn-

ing in his eyes too? A warning—to *me*?

I cast that thought out as pure fantasy. And then, since I had my distillery sketches done, I went dully down to the advertising agency with them, although they weren't due for another two days.

The art director looked them over as I stood beside his desk. "Okay," he said, as he pulled the covering paper from one sketch after another—there were six of them. "They're all right. . . . Say!"

He was looking at the one I had done at dawn. It was a simple one, a picture of a laughing girl handing an elderly man a glass.

"Cleve, this last one! It's swell!"

I looked at it without much interest. The sketch was worth only twenty bucks to me; I hadn't worked any harder on it than I did on any small job. But a little interest grew in me as I stared.

It was rather good. Nothing you could put your finger on. It was just right, that was all.

"This is the best thing you've ever brought in here. You know, I think I can squeeze the appropriation a little and give you thirty for this. . . . Confidentially—what's the matter with you?"

I hadn't been paying much attention to him. And the reason was, that abruptly, I had again got the curious feeling that some one was in the room with me. Some one beside the art director. The unseen person seemed to be standing beside me.

I told him I had been at Austin's party. He shook his head sympathetically.

"That's enough to make any one seem absent-minded. Better loaf for a couple of days. After that, check in here. I'll have a lot of stuff for you—if you can keep on putting guts into your things as you happened to in this last sketch."

I WENT back to the studio, and I thought I heard a sound from near my drawing board. Like a low laugh. A

woman's laugh. But I knew my nerves were playing me tricks, because there was nobody but me in the room. Nobody, I say . . . .

I had the sudden success Bill had had. It was beyond explaining. All of a sudden I felt a surety and power at my work such as I'd never felt before. And the work showed it. The art director began throwing so much work my way that I could hardly handle all of it. And then he called me in and I got two wallops, one of them good and one bad.

The good one was what I'd been working for for a long time—a chance at a big ad job. You don't make the real money in our game till you get the big color jobs, either water color or oils, for the big advertising accounts. But you don't get a chance at them till you're awfully good.

It seemed I was to get my chance now.

"Health-Ring soap is putting on a big campaign," the art director said. "Here's a layout of the first picture to be used. You and one other artist compete. The best first picture gets the string of twelve."

"This," I said sincerely, "is swell. Thanks for the chance."

"Don't mention it," he said. "I'm not doing you a favor. You're doing nice work, that's all."

Then I looked closer at the layout.

"Well, well," I said. "A nude."

"Why not?" he shrugged. "A few of them are coming into the ads. They have to be damned well done, though, to get by. This picture's no cinch, Cleve. But if your muse treats you as well on this as it has on your other recent stuff. . . . *Now* what's wrong?"

I was staring at him with my mouth open. And I could feel my face get cold as blood drained from it.

"Nothing," I said. I put the layout under my arm, and left his office.

And I went to the nearest park bench to sit down—and think!

"If your *muse* treats you as well on this. . . ."

I tried to get hold of myself. What the hell? Lots of people spoke, usually smilingly, of your muse. Any artist gets it. But the last time I'd heard that word was from dead Bill Hargate's lips! And with the art director's careless use of it I realized. . . .

That Bill's eyes *had* held warning for me as well as horror when he looked over my shoulder . . . .

That the other morning I had been more alert in my half-sleep than awake, when I opened my eyes saying, "Hello, who's there?"

That my frequent uneasy conviction in my studio that somebody else, some *thing* else, was in there with me, was true—*That Hargate's muse had left him at death and attached itself to me!*

But this was utter insanity, I told myself. Hargate had been mad when he talked of a muse—a *jealous* muse, if you please—as if it were a thing alive. A muse wasn't personified! It was mastery of talent in your line—inner intelligence whispering the thing to do when your conscious brain was defeated. . . . I didn't know exactly what. But certainly it was no real *thing*, tangible or otherwise, that could actually accompany you around and, of all mad things, be "jealous." . . .

And then, sitting there on the park bench, I thought I heard a low, amused laugh. A woman's laugh. But when I looked around I was alone, save for a nurse maid twenty yards away reading a book while she rocked a baby carriage.

It was the maid who had laughed, of course. Something in her book had been humorous. It was she who had laughed! Of course. . . .

I WENT home with the layout for the discreet advertising nude. I pinned it to my drawing board and got out a fresh canvas and some charcoal. I started roughing in the nude figure—and as I did so, with such startling clarity that I knew I was not imagining it, I *felt* a figure at my side. A figure that was tall and exquisitely slender, and which bent over my shoulder to watch my charcoal strokes.

How did I know that it was tall and slender? I can't tell you even yet. I knew that it was so. That was all.

But I still tried to tell myself that it was nerves; that I hadn't even yet recovered from the shock of Bill's accidental death, although over a week had passed since that had happened.

And I tried to bury myself in work.

The drawing didn't go so well. So I phoned an agency and had a model sent up to draw from life. She was blonde, plump, with a lovely but not very intelligent face. I began the picture at about two in the afternoon.

I was going great guns. I always work fast; this day I worked with a speed that surprised me. And with a surety that delighted me so that I almost forgot the tall, slender figure constantly at my elbow.

I finished the thing at half-past six. And I told the model to get dressed and come and have a hard-earned dinner with me.

She stopped as we were going out the door, and turned to me with a queer look on her face.

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything," I told her. But I hurried her out to hide my trembling. For I had heard what she had: a low-toned, quite distinct word: "*Stop!*"

I drank my dinner that night. For I was trying to drown out my final, bizarre admission to myself.

Bill Hargate had not been mad. Some-

how, some thing from a place listed by no geography had attached itself to his life. Some *thing*, that was almost like the women we know. Some *thing* that by its influence made him do better work than he knew how.

Well, what, would everyone say, was that but—a *muse*? Didn't it fill every definition of the word? An influence, a force from without mortal comprehension, that seemed to guide your hand or brain in the creation of things a little beyond normal ability. . . .

The jealous muse!

God knew for how many centuries that phrase had been used. And I wondered, now, how many artists and writers had had the experience Bill Hargate had had—and which I was now having? Had experienced the same dread thing—and told no one because they knew they'd be judged mad? Had simply referred to the hag-riding thing that made them great—as their muse? The great men of genius who had gone mad—who had killed themselves after lives devoted exclusively to their art. . . .

But had the devotion been because they were absorbed in it, or because they were so terrified and dominated by this dread *muse* that they dared not hold out from her any of their time or thoughts? And had they killed themselves—or *had they been killed?*

For I knew now that Bill Hargate hadn't been killed by that jagged bit of bottle found clutched in his hand! And I knew now how the model he'd been attempting to forget with, had gotten her slashes. . . .

**B**UT these thoughts, almost too mad to be contained by the mind, went on underneath the top of my brain that night. For I was drunk. And the blonde girl with me, was drunk too. I could see in her blue eyes a curious look—an ex-

pression of horror that was blended with wonder as to what it was that could possibly be horrifying her!

Finally we started back to my studio. And as we got to the top of the first flight of stairs, I'll swear I heard a sort of snarl, and the girl fell. She fell backwards down the steps, screaming, for no reason, slipping from my clutch as I tried to catch her. . . .

I took her to the hospital, and made arrangements to pay her bills while two broken legs were set. And then I went back to my studio.

The muse. The jealous muse—not permitting that any slightest thought or interest be diverted from work and from *her!* *She* had made that girl fall. *She* was beside me now, triumphant, a sort of harpy with narrow green eyes. . . .

And how did I know that? I gasped the question to myself. I couldn't answer it. I only knew that *her* eyes were narrow and greenish. Bill's words about the eyes of Egyptian priestesses recurred to me, and my silly, sardonic reply. . . .

I didn't sleep that night, nor the next. And I completely forgot about the big job in color—till the art director called me the next afternoon.

"I don't want to hurry you, Cleve. But the other man has his picture in."

I told him I'd bring it in the morning. Mechanically, I put in a few last touches, and then slid the canvas into a corrugated carton that would keep anything from touching its still-wet surface. And I went out to get drunk again, with something tall and exquisitely slender walking in icy fury beside me.

I looked at myself in the mirror as I got wearily from bed next morning, and again I thought of Hargate. My face was as lined and sunken as his had been the day before he died. And in my eyes was the same veiled terror that had been in his. . . .

I threw clothes on myself, snatched up the carton with the picture in it, and hurried to the advertising office.

The art director took the canvas from the container while I bit my lips and tried to tell myself there was *not* a third presence in that tiny office with us. I didn't look at him till I heard his voice.

"Well, there's no doubt here as to who gets the series of pictures to draw!"

I STARED at him then. His voice had held a curious note, and his face was curious too. He was gazing at that picture.

"Cleve, this . . . this is too good. It seems a damned shame that it goes into advertising, though for heaven's sake don't let the old man know I'm guilty of such heresy. It's . . . marvelous, Cleve."

I almost forgot the *muse* for a moment. Marvelous? Well, it had been competently done, as all my things were since *she* had been with me. But hardly marvelous. . . .

And then I saw the picture myself, and the office walls swam around me.

I had done the *blonde*.

On this canvas, the girl kneeling in shadow was *not that blonde!* The face was the high-cheek-boned one of a beautiful Mongol. The eyes were narrow, greenish, mystic. The hair that rayed down over the marvelous bare shoulders was *red*. Red? It was liquid flame; hair such as no earthly woman ever had, yet all the more arresting for the fact that buried in it was an implication of something not quite human.

I jerked my hand out so convulsively that if he hadn't knocked it aside, I'd have smeared the paint.

"That's not my picture!" I blurted.

He stared at me. "What's the matter with you? What are you talking about?"

"It's not my picture!"

He put the picture down against the

wall behind him, and he handled it as I've never seen him handle a canvas before.

"Stop the kidding, Cleve. You're no Rembrandt, but you do have touches in your works that always identifies them. I know you painted that hair. And I'd know the girl's chin anywhere as your work." He scowled a little. "Go get a drink or something. You seem to need it. I think you're cracked. But you sure can paint, all of a sudden!"

I don't know how I got out of there. I only remember reeling up to my studio with over a pint of whiskey under my belt.

And with a determination in my brain to rid myself of *her*.

How could I go on living when I knew I was no longer strictly accountable for my own actions? I had apparently got up in the night, dead asleep as I'd thought I was, taken that picture out of the carton and touched in *her* face instead of the model's! If I had done that, what other things might I do in my sleep?

And how could I go on living when for me there was nothing but work—and *her*? Working, slaving over my board, I was all right—with the tall, slim figure, in all its sinister loveliness, standing beside me contented. But let me stop work, and strange terror emanated from the flame-haired harpy unseen beside me! Let me so much as talk to a woman, and I heard the hissed, deadly: "Stop!"

The muse. The *jealous* muse!

I HAD my sense of power in my work that I'd never had before. A few art critics were beginning to ask me why I didn't try something for a gallery instead of for advertising. . . .

—And I'd have thrown it all—if I could have gotten rid of *her* at the same time!

I finished the remaining eleven color pictures in two weeks. Each was a study of the flame-haired, greenish-eyed figure

that had so arrested the art director's attention in the first submission. Fortunately—for I was unable to draw anything else—the same figure was specified throughout. It seemed the soap company wanted to build up a "Health-Ring Girl," as a sort of trademark. And that was ironical, too. My muse, weird, otherworldly *thing* compounded of glory and terror and blood, was to become a trademark on a cake of soap! I was almost amused by that.

It was shortly after completion of the series that I met Judith. You, who have followed much of this story in the newspapers, must have been waiting perplexedly for that name. Judith Grace. All the newspaper columns were about her and me—none of this that I've been penning down was in them.

Judith Grace.

I met her in a restaurant at dinner. She was with Austin and a girl who looked into Austin's eyes often and paid little attention to me.

Judith was small and dark-haired and grey-eyed and as lovely as a Dresden miniature. I met her at dinner-time, and I was profoundly in love with her when I took her home at two that morning. So much in love with her that I was going to get rid of my damned muse or die!

My life, I thought it was that I was gambling with. Only mine. Had not Bill Hargate said: "I'm going to have some fun if *I* die for it?" And had it not been *he* whom his muse had killed because of his effort at rebellion? The girl he'd been with had been slashed, and had gone mad, but had not been killed. And in the desperation of my rebellion against *her*, and the depth of my swift love for Judith, I let her risk the fate of Bill's tall model. That was my one sin, I guess. If so, I've certainly paid for it. . . .

We sat in the studio for hours, Judith and I, exploring each other's mind, de-

lighted with each other's philosophy and outlook. And if my voice was a little hoarse, a little tremulous now and then because of the unseen, silently screaming fury *she* had become beside us, Judith didn't know the difference; because she didn't know me well enough to realize that neither my words nor my voice were normal.

THE ending of that night is blurred in a sea of horror in my mind. I can't recall dread details. I only know that as the dirty grey of dawn stained my skylight I remember thinking to myself, "This is it. This love I have for a girl I didn't even know twelve hours ago, is the biggest thing in life. Bigger than work. Bigger than *her*. I will not give it up!"

And then I remember a sudden silence, in which the body of Judith in the circle of my arm began to tremble. And I remember that a silence that had started by being only strained became suddenly terrible.

It was ended by Judith's scream.

"What is that? There! Oh—Cleve. . ."

Near an easel, on which rested a study of a nude, where she was pointing with rigid finger, a dim spot of light seemed to waver. It was so very dim that it might not have been there at all, or might have been the faint reflection of red dawn from one of my skylight panes . . . But no, it couldn't have been that. For Judith screamed. And she wouldn't have screamed at nothing but the reddish faint reflection of the dawn, would she?

The tall, slender light-spot, too faint even to be called that, hovered in front of the painting. It seemed to grow stronger, to assume the form of a tall, slender woman with one arm up-raised.

Then it moved toward us, and disappeared.

And that, as God is my judge, is all I know. Save that Judith screamed a second time, and then was still. And when I looked down at the figure gone suddenly stark and moveless in the circle of my arm, I saw a delicate white throat slashed almost from ear to ear. . . .

They didn't put me in the chair. They put me here, in this asylum. The high-priced lawyer who attached himself to me for the money that came in from the twelve color pictures, had an easy time convincing a jury that I was insane. I suppose he thought I'd thank him for saving my life at any price. But I don't. I want to die. And I'm going to die, I know, some one of these nights. . . .

*She* is through with me now that I can no longer work and live under her despotic direction. *She* is ready to quit me, when life has left me and freed her; ready to go on to some other poor devil—artist, sculptor, scientist, writer—to make him great at the cost of everything a normal man holds dear on earth.

She'll slash my throat some day, as she did Bill Hargate's, as she did poor Judith Grace's. . . .

\* \* \*

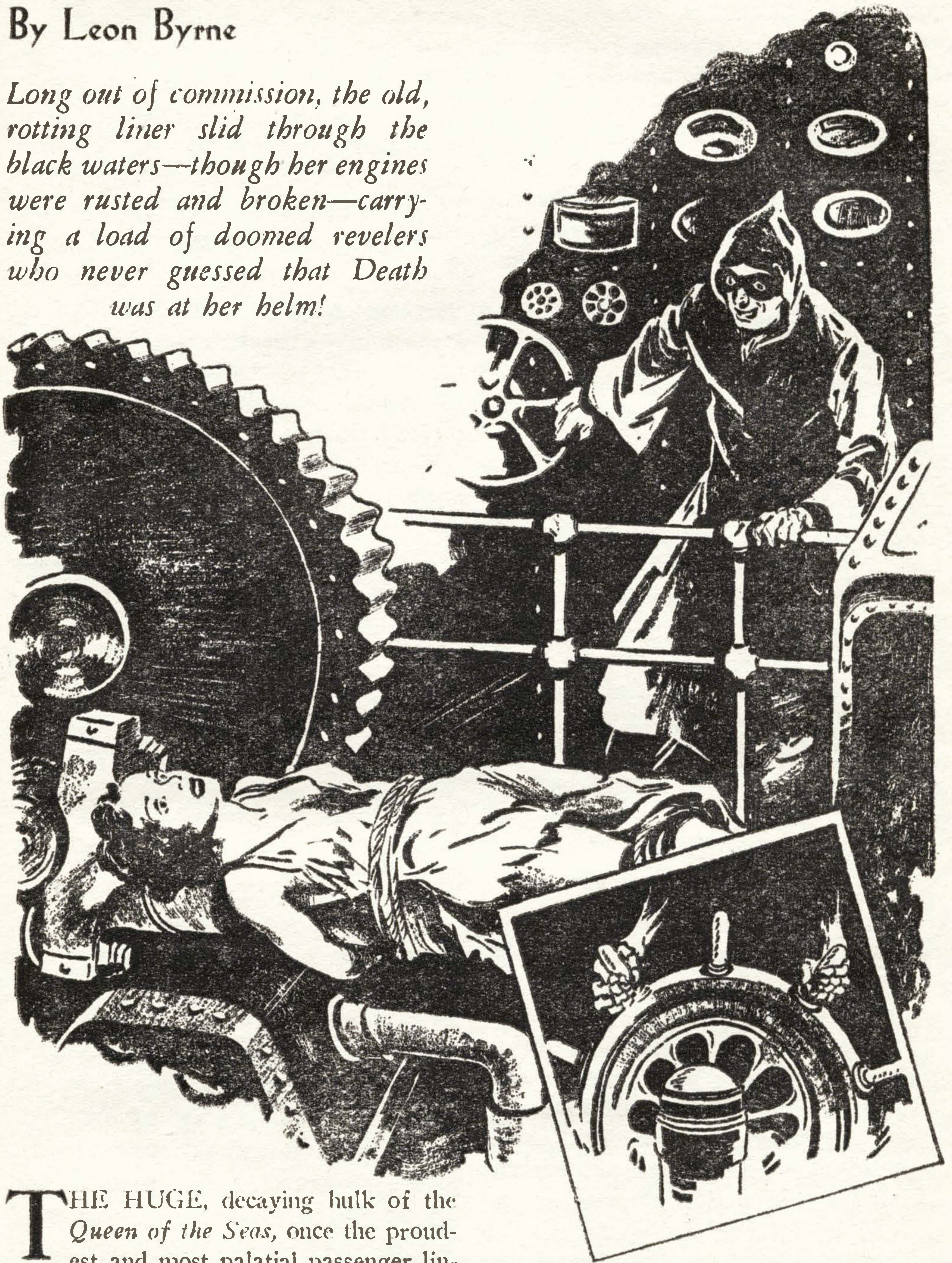
The above account was discovered in the mattress of Cleve Andrews, artist, this morning after he was found dead in his room at Holyrood Asylum. A prominent painter, he evidently took his own life under the spell of his obsession. His throat was fatally slashed. Police, unable to find a knife in his locked room, state that he slashed himself with a razor blade and managed, dying, to throw it out a nearby window. Andrews was recently judged criminally insane at his trial for the murder of Miss Judith Grace. . . .



# HELL'S GHOST SHIP

By Leon Byrne

*Long out of commission, the old, rotting liner slid through the black waters—though her engines were rusted and broken—carrying a load of doomed revelers who never guessed that Death was at her helm!*



**T**HE HUGE, decaying hulk of the *Queen of the Seas*, once the proudest and most palatial passenger liner afloat, loomed weirdly above us as we trooped along the pier toward the narrow gangplank that served as the only link between the old ship and the New Jersey pier—that was her last berth.

It was late autumn, and moist, tenuous fingers of fog swirled off the steaming Hudson to writhe upward about the frayed lines and tattered superstructure, ob-

scuring the not-far-distant shoreline of Manhattan.

The clamminess of the night was no damper on our spirits, however, for we were in festive mood for this nocturnal jaunt into the glories of a dead past. All of us were, I must confess, suffused with a warm glow induced by numerous cocktails we had partaken of in Craig Westfall's Gramercy Park apartment just before taking the ferry to Hoboken. Not yet had terror touched our gayety....

It had been Craig's idea, this after-dark foray. "I've got a little surprise for you," he had told Marcia and me, with a note of subdued excitement, when he cornered us at the Parkinson's very elaborate and very dull dinner party. "In half an hour or so, when we won't be missed, we'll slip away, and—you're in for a treat!"

We had left the party, half a dozen of us, specially invited guests of Craig's and we had stopped off at his place for a few "bracers" against the autumn chill. Rosamund Poole, Marcia's younger sister; Ralph Clayton, Craig's partner in the Westfall Steamship Company, which owned the *Queen of the Seas*, and Ralph's wife, Helen, made up the group.

"You're going to pay a visit to the most romantic place—the most romantic *thing*—around New York," Craig had said as he served cocktails. "A ghost ship."

He had chosen an appropriate night, for the thickening fog made an unreal and ghostly scene of the deserted Hoboken waterfront. There had been a brief pause while Craig conversed with the ancient and sleepy watchman at the entrance to the pier, then that hooded-eyed patriarch, looking like a malicious Old Man of the Sea, swung open the wire gate and we trooped through.

"The *Queen of the Seas*," said Craig with a sweep of his arm, "once lived up to her famous name. Look at her now—

a decrepit old hag. But there's still romance in her."

"Looks more like the queen of Davy Jones' locker," said Marcia with a nervous little laugh as she looked up at the rust-eaten sides of the old leviathan. Leprous splotches of discolored paint festooned its gaunt hull, and one lifeboat hung crazily askew in its davits.

Craig, who had taken at least a half dozen more drinks than the rest of us, laughed uproariously at Marcia's remark. "Maybe she will be Davy Jones' bride sometime," he said. Then, without explaining that cryptic remark, he stepped aside and motioned the rest of us up the narrow plank that led from the dock to an open cargo port.

"You lead, Jim," he said to me, "and I'll bring up the rear to catch those who fall by the wayside."

Taking one of Marcia's hands in mine, I grasped the guide rope with the other and led her up the steep incline. The tide was in full, and the *Queen of the Seas* rode high in the water. The cargo port opened onto one of the lower decks, dimly illumined by occasional electric bulbs strung out on an extension from shore.

"Now for some climbing," said Craig. "I know the old girl like a book, so I'll lead the way." Using a pocket flash, he led us upward through a maze of passageways and stairways until we reached the main deck, then down a long corridor that gave entrance to the grand lounge. Craig fumbled around until he found a switch, snapped it on. The few scattered and yellowish bulbs, also apparently connected with the shore circuit, instead of illuminating the vast and hollow expanse of the salon, seemed to make its columned aisles endless, stretching off into infinity—seemed to enhance the inexplicable fear that began to steal over me....

HERE was truly a grand ruin. Moth-eaten tapestries hung gauntly from mottled walls; most of the furniture had been removed, but what remained was dust-laden, sagging, decrepit. Time had taken quick toll of the *Queen of the Seas*, once she had been laid up.

Craig threw his hat on a divan, unbuttoned his raglan, and drew a huge flask from its inner pocket.

"Now," he said, "the party really begins. Make yourselves at home, folks, while I set up the bar." He poured a generous drink into the cap of the flask and handed it to Marcia.

"You may be the first, my dear Marcia, to drink to yourself—and your future husband." He gave me an affectionate pat on the back. "That's hardly the way the book of etiquette prescribes it, but, since we have only the one cup.... The drink, by the way, is a favorite of mine; I had Bridges mix it especially just before we left the apartment."

Marcia took a sip, and her eyes widened approvingly. "It is good," she said. "And you—I think you're a good sport." She raised the glass. "If you don't mind, I'll drink this one to you, as head man of the Good Loser's League."

"Nicely put," laughed Ralph Clayton, reaching for the flask. "I'll drink to all three of you." Ralph, like the others, knew that the suave and silver-haired Craig Westfall had been my rival for Marcia Poole's affections until a month ago, when Marcia and I had announced our engagement. Craig had taken it hard at first—he was a man who had known few disappointments in life—but recently he had gone out of his way to show his friendship for both Marcia and me.

"There is," said Craig, retrieving the flask and passing the drinks around, "such a thing as knowing when you're licked." He poured a brimming cup and

handed it to me. "To the better man," he said—a trifle sardonically, I thought.

"I suppose you wonder why I brought you over here tonight," he went on, looking at Marcia rather than at the rest of us. "Just to satisfy a sentimental whim, I suppose. If you remember, my dear, it was in this lounge, five years ago this month, on the *Queen's* last trip from Europe, that I first was bold enough to ask you to be my wife. Do you remember?"

"Of course I remember, Craig," Marcia laughed. "I was coming back from school in France. I was a silly young thing then, and being proposed to by the great Craig Westfall swept me off my feet—almost."

"Almost," said Craig with a shrug of mock resignation, "but not quite. So, what more notable gesture could the vanquished make the victor than to fete him on the scene of his own defeat? Ralph, strike up the band—let's dance!"

With a happy shout Ralph swept the dust-laden covering from a once-imposing grand piano and thumped out a few bars. "Half the keys work, anyway," he said as he swung into a foxtrot. Craig seized Marcia in his arms and whirled away with her, and with a whoop of pleasure—Craig's butler certainly knew how to mix cocktails—I tossed my coat over a chair, clamped a firm hold on Helen Clayton's waist and proceeded to try to whirl her dizzy.

"Isn't it fun!" she breathed excitedly. "And isn't it *spooky*. It's just like dancing in—in a catacomb! Don't you think Craig is awfully nice, the way he takes things, especially when he was so crazy about Marcia?"

"I think," I said, "that everybody and everything is perfectly elegant."

And then the lights went out. We were plunged in utter blackness.

The three girls screamed, and the music

stopped. I could hear Craig curse as he stumbled over a chair.

"Don't get excited," he called from across the saloon. "I'll get my flash and see what's wrong."

Every light on the ship had gone out at the same time, and he floundered helplessly for a minute before the beam of his flash stabbed the inky blackness.

"Must be a short circuit in the wiring," he said. "I'll call the watchman and have him investigate." He started toward the door leading to the promenade deck.

"Wait!" shrilled Rosamund, scurrying after him. "Don't leave us here in the dark."

We piled through the door after him in a confused jumble, hurried over to the rail. It was at that moment that I saw what was happening.

Slowly and silently, but inexorably, the *Queen of the Seas* was moving away from the pier!

I THINK I sobered up quicker than I ever have or ever will. I, like the others, stood goggle eyed and watched the distance grow between ship and pier, watched the mooring lines, which had been loosed from the bollards, drop one by one from the dock and hang like dead serpents from the side of the *Queen*.

It was only when the gangplank fell with a hollow thud to the dock that I found my voice, and the others joined in the bedlam.

"Ashore!" I shouted. "Ashore! We're adrift! Hallo, ashore!" The only answer from the black and deserted pier was silence.

As we watched, the *Queen* swung out and away from the dock, out into the broad Hudson, turned slowly and headed majestically downstream, down toward the open sea. One minute we could see the wharf line of Jersey; the next it was

blotted out by the ominous, creeping blanket of fog that had closed over the ship like a smothering pall.

The lights of Manhattan were reflected dimly against the sky on our left, the lights of Jersey were a dimmer glow against the heavens on our right, but around us, bearing down on us, smothering us, was only a solid grey wall of fog.

"My God!" shouted Craig. "What's happened? *And where is Marcia?*"

I spun around, shocked into action by his words. His flash, playing over our faces, revealed what had escaped our notice in the excitement and bewilderment of the previous minutes. Marcia was not with us.

"She's still in the lounge," I said, darting to the door—knowing with a sickening feeling that she would not be in the lounge.

"Marcia!" I called. "Marcia, where are you?" The huge hall echoed my shout mockingly.

"Here, give me that!" and I grabbed the flash from Craig's hand and ran into the salon, knocking over chairs, peering behind sofas, barging into pillars in my frenzied search. The others joined me, and it was only after five futile minutes that we were forced to realize what we had feared. Marcia had disappeared as completely as though a giant hand had plucked her from the ship—the same giant hand that seemed to have reached down out of the sky and was propelling the *Queen of the Seas* down the Hudson, toward the sea—the sea whose graveyard is Davy Jones' locker.

It was Craig who stemmed the panic that had started to seize us all. "We can't lose our heads," he said sternly, when we finally gathered, panting and trembling, in the center of the salon. "Marcia is somewhere on this ship and we can soon find her"

"But what's happening?" wailed Helen, "and where are we going?"

"Time enough to worry about that later," I flung at her. "The thing to do now is to find Marcia—she may be hurt or unconscious somewhere."

"Look!" called Ralph from the doorway. "Here are a couple of lanterns—probably left here for emergency use." He flicked a match and touched it to the blackened wicks. "I say the sensible thing is to split up and comb the ship. We can cover more territory if we're not all together."

"You're not going to leave me behind," wailed Helen and Rosamund in unison.

"Of course not," Craig said. "Rosamund, you come with me and we'll look in the starboard decks and passages. You and Helen take the port side, Ralph. Jim, you—"

"I've got a hunch," I said, grabbing a lantern and setting off at a run. "If anybody sees her, yell—"

**T**ERROR clutching at my throat, I bounded forward, through intricate and winding passages, seeking a companionway leading to the boat deck. Up I went three steps at a time, and forward to the ladder leading to the bridge.

The *Queen of the Seas* was silent, darkened, apparently floating in a sea of grey vapor without volition of her own, yet I felt that the evil genius that was engineering this fantastic ride would be found at the ship's very heart—the navigating bridge. There, I thought, I would find Marcia.

I pounded upward, my lungs bursting, my spirit leaden with fear. . . . As I swung around the railing to ascend the last stairs I heard the frantic tooting of a ferry-boat's whistle, saw its lights loom out of the murk off the starboard bow.

Almost at the same instant it struck the sideplates of the *Queen*, and the prow of the smaller craft crumpled like match-

wood. With a rending, tearing wail of splintered timbers the ferry rebounded, and before it disappeared in the fog I had a glimpse of a terrified, howling throng of men and women surging onto its decks. Then it was gone—and the *Queen of the Seas* sailed on, serene.

With a sob flung myself over the topmost step and onto the navigating bridge. Holding my lantern before me, calling Marcia's name, I hurled myself into the wheelhouse. I stopped dead in my tracks.

By the flickering light of my upraised lantern I stared at the lone occupant of that room, stared in petrified amazement. It was not Marcia, but a man. Dressed in the habiliments of a quartermaster, he stood at the wheel, feet braced apart, arms outstretched to grasp the spokes, eyes staring unwaveringly and glassily ahead. Not a muscle of him moved, there was not a quiver of his dummy-like, putty colored features. The man's throat was cut from ear to ear!

With a scream of terror I seized a metal map case from a chart table and hurled it at that grisly apparition. Slowly and swiftly, like a stick of wood that has been balanced upright, he swayed and started to totter over backward.

I did not wait to watch him fall. Dead men, even those who had the eerie power to stand alone, could not help me find Marcia, and one quick glance had shown me that she was not in the wheelhouse. I ran out onto the flying bridge.

I stepped up to the wind-tattered canvas dodger and peered toward the prow. From that dizzying height the river below was invisible, as was the extreme forward end of the ship. Off to port the fantastic fog bank lifted momentarily and I saw that we were already sweeping by the Battery, the tip end of Manhattan—then as quickly the mists closed down again, blotting out that friendly glimpse of a possible haven.

But one light stood out against the white opaqueness of the sky—the torch of the Statue of Liberty, a lone and flickering beacon suspended in the air on the right. The tide, which had been full when we boarded the *Queen of the Seas*, had turned, and that hazy torch, now revealed, now concealed, told all too clearly how swiftly the current was whirling us toward the open sea.

The chances were one in a thousand that a drifting ship of the *Queen's* bulk would float, without grounding, all the way through the tortuous channels of the upper and lower bays. Yet, although her engines were silent and her vast expanse seemed uninhabited, I had an eerie, terror-born feeling that some powerful and malign force was directing her course.

The forward decks below me, as far as I could see, were deserted. It was foolish to look for Marcia there anyway. Unless she was overboard—and my blood congealed at the thought—she was down somewhere in the black depths of this floating mausoleum, this wandering wreck of a once regal craft, this runaway leviathan that surged through the night like a juggernaut of doom.

I swung around to the after side of the bridge and looked toward the stern. Even the lanterns of my companions were invisible. There was nothing in the whole world but grey, clammy fog and the wailing and moaning of foghorns, some near and some far away, all of them charged with the dread portent of fear, the fear of fog-bound ships.

Suddenly, above the cacaphony of whistles, a woman's scream sheared through the awful solitude that rode the *Queen of the Seas*. It was a scream of terror, suddenly choked off, and it came from the stern.

CARELESS of broken bones, I went down from that bridge like a plummet dropping straight into hell. I came

out on the glass-enclosed promenade deck, raced down the long, tunnel-like passageway. Almost to the stern, on the starboard side, a light bobbed about grotesquely, like a weird fog-born will-o'-the-wisp.

As I panted up to it I saw that it was Craig's flash. He was staggering like a drunken man, and he yelled when he saw me.

"Rosamund!" He croaked. "They've got Rosamund too! We had just passed that ventilator shaft when somebody—or something—leaped out at us. I remember Rosamund starting to scream, and then a ton of bricks landed on the back of my skull. I must have been out for a minute, because when I came to I was lying on the deck, and Rosamund was gone. My God, Jim—" he seized my arm, and I could feel him trembling—"two of them gone! What hellish thing is behind this—"

"Stop your yammering," I shouted at him, "and come on. We've got to find them—and find Ralph and Helen. We should never have separated."

Setting off at a lope, throwing our lights into every recess and corner as we went, we circled the ship completely, first to the stern, then around on the port side and forward again, calling, calling. Our shouts were fruitless and our search was fruitless. And all the while, the *Queen of the Seas* forged her silent and relentless way ahead, and the implacable fog rolled over and about us like a devil's smoke screen.

"That ferryboat we hit—" Craig panted as we swung once more into the grand salon for one more futile look there—"she must have reported us, unless she sank. Harbor police or coast guard. . . . My God, only you and I left, Jim, only. . . ."

His voice trailed off, faded into nothingness. I spun about, and the hairs at

the back of my neck rose in a chill, primordial bristle. I was alone, completely and utterly alone!

"Craig!" I shouted. "Craig!" And I pounded on the wall beside which he had just been standing. The wooden paneling gave out a hollow, mocking echo, but it did not budge. As I flung up my fists to batter them against the wainscoting the lantern slipped from my grasp and smashed to the floor, plunging the salon into impenetrable blackness.

For an instant I stood stone blind; then, as my eyes became accustomed to the murk, I saw what had been invisible before—a faint and luminous glow from the far end of the lounge. It was several feet from the floor, and as I stood transfixed and watched, it began to move toward me with a slow and jerky motion.

On it came inexorably, with a malicious deliberateness, and I was too terrified to move, to call out, for I saw now that the phosphorescent glow was a circle about the neck of a man, whose throat had been cut from ear to ear!

It was the sailor of the bridge, the dead man who had been steering a ship, the corpse I had knocked over with a metal map case. His eyes, gleaming in the dark, were wide, glassy, staring straight at me.

Then the terror that had frozen me melted in a searing wave of fury. Fingers hooked into talons, I lunged forward to clutch that dripping throat, to wring from those slate colored lips the secret of this macabre mockery. Too late I heard the swish of a descending weapon from behind, and consciousness was blotted from my mind with a sickening and lurid rush.

**N**AUSEATED, my head splitting with unbearable pain, I struggled to regain control of my bewildered faculties. As the cobwebs cleared from my stunned brain, I realized that I was lying, helplessly trussed, on a steel grating, high

above a maze of ponderous and rust scarred machinery—the engine room of the *Queen of the Seas*.

It was a woman's scream that brought me fully to my senses, the scream of a woman in mortal terror—the scream of my sweetheart, Marcia Poole. I rolled over onto my face, peered down through the grating, and I was sickened by what I saw by the reflected light of one of the oil-burning boilers in which a white-hot fire was glowing.

Stretched out on the deck plates, tied hand and foot, were Ralph and Helen and Rosamund. Near them, struggling fiercely, Marcia fought desperately and frantically in the grasp of a black-robed, black-hooded figure. With the frenzy of despair she clawed and scratched, but the monster in the black battered her mercilessly, brutally, until she collapsed.

Even then he did not stop, but ripped savagely at her flimsy evening gown, shredding it, wantonly tossing strips of cloth aside until she lay naked upon the deck plates.

I struggled mightily at the ropes which bound my wrists and ankles, but the knots had been tied by an expert, and I only mangled my flesh futilely. Rolling over, I forced myself to a sitting position, my lacerated wrists behind me. Frantically I cast about for some sharp projection, some cutting edge that might fray the rope. Then there was a stickiness on my numbed fingers, and I realized that I had cut them on the sharp steel edge of the very grating on which I was lying. With a strength born of frenzied fear for my sweetheart, I began sawing, back and forth, back and forth.

Even as I sawed, I realized that I could never sever those strands in time to avert the cruel butchery, that was about to take place below.

With a mad laugh, the hooded figure seized the unconscious form of Marcia

and hoisted her to his shoulder. While the other three prisoners and I looked on in horror he grasped a stout length of rope from the floor and strode with diabolical purposefulness to one of the huge piston rods that jutted from its housing to connect with the main drive shaft. He lashed her to that ponderous metal arm.

I redoubled my furious efforts as the full meaning of his inhuman preparations struck me. With the steam that was being generated, that huge shaft could be set in motion, and Marcia's helpless body would be ground to an unrecognizable pulp at the end of the drive shaft well. It was murder, wanton and horrible, that this madman planned, and it would be mass murder, for the rest of us must surely meet the same fate that Marcia faced.

His task completed, the black masked devil clambered with the agility of an ape to the control platform, a grating at a lower level than the one on which I struggled. He threw back his head and glared up at me, and he snarled when our eyes met.

"Struggle, you fool," he screamed, "struggle while you can! And watch!"

I watched, and I struggled, and I cursed him with a slow and deadly fury, for now I knew him.

"You thought you'd have her, you thought you'd take her from me—you thought I'd let you take her from me, *me!*" Stark insanity had gripped the man; his howls were the howls of a maniac. His hand reached out to the big wheel that controlled the main steam valve—and the sweat blinded my eyes as I lunged back and forth, back and forth, hacking at the cords on my wrists.

"And you, you blind ignoramus—" he flung at Clayton—"thought you'd share the money that is coming to me—" one strand of my bonds snapped—"the money that means a new start, new wealth—"

a second strand broke—"new riches. All of you are fools! Watch!"

A mighty surge of desperation swept through me, and I literally tore the last strands in two. Whipping my arms around in front of me, I snatched at the rope on my ankles. My fingers were numb, the knots were of iron—and the leering madman below me had given the valve wheel a half turn. Long disuse had rusted it, and it stuck momentarily. While he struggled with it, I plucked loose the last knot and staggered to my feet.

I reeled along that narrow metal lattice-work a dozen feet to a tool rack, seized a heavy spanner and hurled it all in one motion. It flew straight and true, at the maniac's head, but not until he had loosened the rusted wheel and given it a complete turn.

In those next few bewildering seconds I moved faster than I had ever moved in my life. Even as that wrench struck that caped head a glancing blow, tearing off the cape to reveal the rage-contorted features beneath, even while Craig Westfall staggered backward and toppled from the platform on which he stood, I seized a razor edged chisel from the tool box, leaped from grating to grating, landed running on the engine room floor and catapulted myself toward Marcia.

I was slashing at the ropes that bound her before Craig Westfall had ended his plunge—into the drive shaft well to which he had consigned Marcia. I have one ineffable scene of stark horror etched into my brain, a picture I will never be able to forget.

As I fell backward with the pitifully limp figure of Marcia in my arms, the long-dormant metal vitals of the *Queen of the Seas* shuddered into action. With the scream of tortured steel and brass, with the sibilant roar of escaping steam, the monster engines turned over once. With a spasmodic surge, the ponderous arm of



death that was to have obliterated Marcia swung to the end of its travel, where it jarred to a thundering stop. Beneath it, unrecognizable now, was the man who had planned too diabolically well. I saw that, and then merciful unconsciousness claimed me again. . . .

**B**UT little of the mystery remained when I awoke to find my head held in Marcia's overcoat-draped arms. "Darling!" she said, which was all I wanted to hear.

I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving that she was unharmed—and then I sat bolt upright. Behind her, not ten feet away, was the man with the cut throat.

"Everything's all right, dear," Marcia whispered. "The coast guard cutter found us just in time." Then I saw that the man whose throat was cut—who was very much alive right now—was held on either side by a burly coast guardsman. Lined up under the surveillance of other guardsmen were half a dozen disreputable looking thugs.

"Feeling better, Mr. Hunt?" asked a crisp voice, and an officer stepped forward. "Bosn's Mate Drake, sir. A fine mess of gallows birds you've collected for us."

"But what—what happened?" I stammered.

"Thanks to the accommodating tongue of this rascal—" he nodded toward the man with the cut throat—"and a little persuasion, we've got it pretty well figured out," said Drake. "Your friend Westfall wasn't the rich man he once was. In fact, he was almost penniless. One of his few remaining assets was the *Queen of the Seas*. The insurance hadn't run out on her yet—and it was very heavy insurance—but it was about to expire. Then she'd be worth practically nothing—merely what the junkman would offer.

"If she could be wrecked, however, or

sunk at sea, he'd have a chance of collecting on her. He hatched up a scheme, unknown to his partner Clayton, to scuttle her, and make it look the work of vandals, or business enemies. I don't know if he intended to sink her here in the harbor, or take her out to sea and wreck her, but he laid his plans well.

"He waited for a foggy night, to cover his actions, then had one of his tugboat crews stand by for the signal to take her in tow. The tug is big and powerful, and her engines can be muffled till they're almost noiseless. When the tide is full, with no current either way, one big tug could swing her out into the stream. A long towline and the fog kept you from seeing the tug."

"But why," I insisted, getting to my feet, "should Westfall take us along—and why plan on killing all of us?"

"Partly malice, partly avarice, as far as I can figure from what your friends have told me," said Drake. "He wanted to kill you because he hated you. He wanted to kill Miss Poole because she had turned him down. He wanted to kill Miss Poole's sister because he hated anything that was dear to her. He wanted to kill Clayton and his wife so he could have all the insurance money for himself."

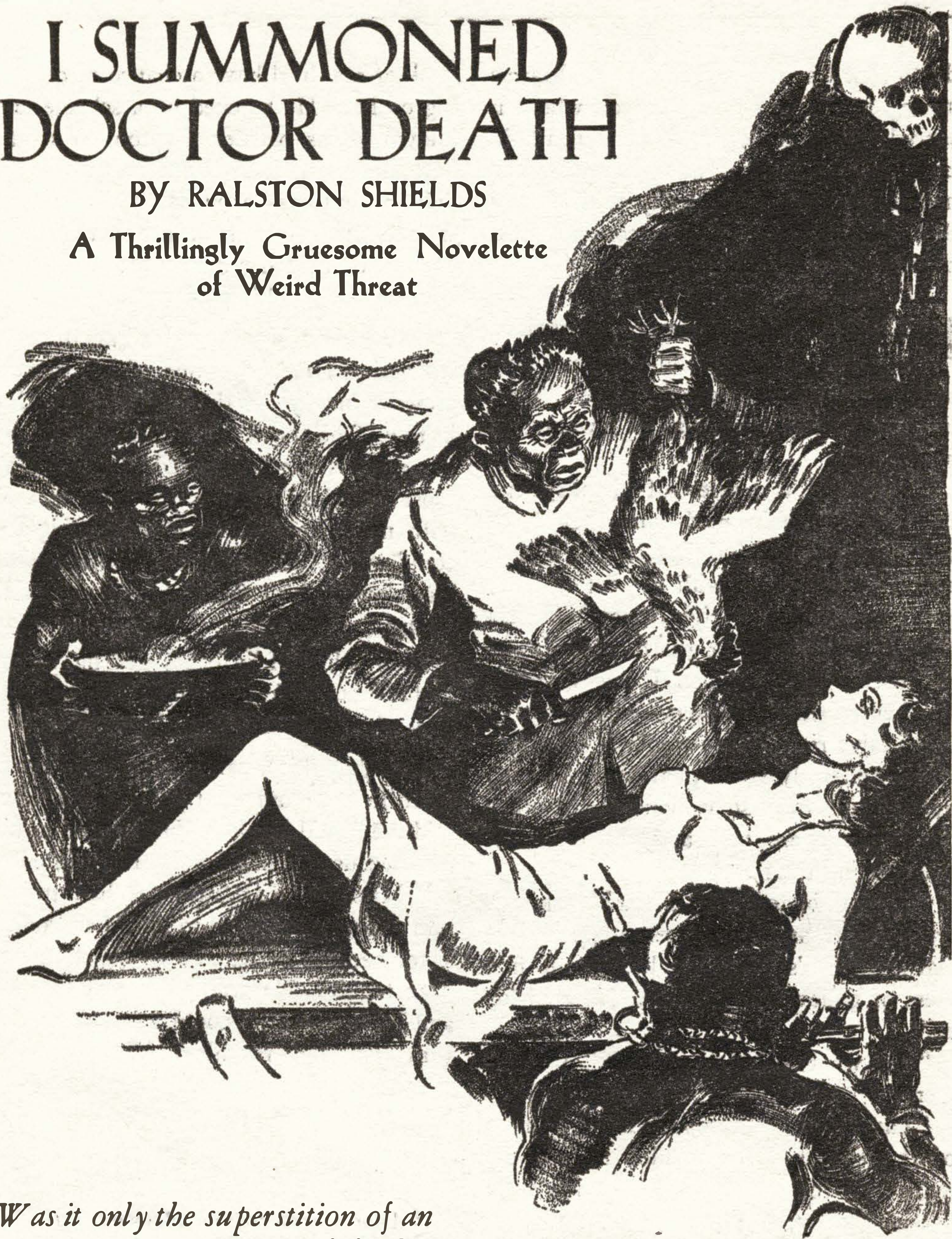
"I can see all that," I said. "But I can't figure why he should have a walking dead man on the ship—or how a dead man *could* walk."

"Merely part of the pleasant little job of killing you. Westfall was a sadist. He wanted to frighten you half to death, torture you, before he killed you. As for your walking dead man—" Drake scooped a handful of rag waste from the floor and threw it in the "dead" man's face—"here, you, wipe that red lead and phosphorous off your ugly throat. You'll get another kind of decoration where you're going."

# I SUMMONED DOCTOR DEATH

BY RALSTON SHIELDS

A Thrillingly Gruesome Novelette  
of Weird Threat



*Was it only the superstition of an ignorant Negress—or did that old colored woman actually give me the powers of a sorcerer? Whatever it was, I knew that I would need it far more than any mere physical strength—after my wife's nude body was exposed to the avid, lecherous gaze of human beasts in the laboratory of Hell's Physician!*

“WELL, good-day, Mr. Trumbull. I shouldn't worry any more, if I were you—I'm sure everything is all right now. Good-day, sir—good-day . . .”

I closed the door behind Dr. Westwood, and turned in the dark hall to go upstairs again. Everything all right now—or was it? Had the doctor really got to the root of Estelle's strange affliction?

True, we had left her a moment ago, resting peacefully after the great psychiatrist's hypnotic treatment. But we had tried so many things, seen so many doctors, all to no avail, that I could still not quite believe our troubles at an end. Dr. Westwood had told me to let my wife sleep



undisturbed for at least eight hours—but I could not restrain myself from opening the door of her bedroom for an instant to see that everything was—all right. . . .

Thank God for that—thank God, I didn't restrain myself from yielding to that impulse.

Estelle had broken the water-tumbler that stood on her bedside table. She sat before the mirror at her dressing table, clad only in a filmy night-gown that had slipped down at one shoulder.

Lord, she was beautiful—the tawny gold of her skin was actually darker than the cascade of pale hair that poured over her delicately rounded shoulders. Estelle was the thing I loved best in all the world—and now, before my horrified gaze, she

was peering at her reflection in the glass, and trying to drive the sharp point of a fragment of the broken tumbler into her throat . . . .

I bounded forward with all the swiftness of desperation—dashed the shard of glass from her hand. I was in time—but barely in time. Already the satin skin was broken: a trickle of blood coursed downward over her breast like an evil red serpent of death . . . .

And so another hope was gone. The famous Dr. Westwood's treatment had been useless as the treatments of all the others—eminent psychologists, brain specialists, physicians . . . .

Now as I held her in my arms, held her precious form close to me, I asked the question again and again: "Why—Oh God, why? My darling, what makes you do it? Why do you want to die?"

And as she clung to me, trembling, sobbing convulsively, she could only answer, as always: "I—I don't know . . . . I—don't—know . . . ."

That was the devil of it—there was no motive to remove, no cause to get at. It is a fact that Estelle loved me as much as I loved her. We were not rich, but we had enough money to be comfortable. I'm not boasting when I say that Estelle had every reason to be happy. And yet, somewhere in her subconscious mind that devil of self-destruction still lurked; it was still there to take control of her every volition. It had been so for three months now—ever since we had returned from our Far Eastern honeymoon to live in San Francisco. On six different occasions during that period she had been prevented in the nick of time from killing herself. Is it any wonder that we were both nearly frantic with anxiety?

**I** SUCCEEDED in quieting Estelle to some extent, finally. I laid her on her bed again, washed the scratch she had

made on the skin of her throat, stroked the hair back from her forehead until her eyes were closed and her breathing came a little slower . . . .

Then I called for Amelia. The immense, coal-black Negress came bustling into the room, and I motioned her to Estelle's bedside. I told her softly what had happened, and said she must not on any account go out of the room until I had returned. Then I left them—Amelia clucking and frowning with concern over Estelle—and went downstairs.

It may seem odd that I left Estelle at such a time, but Amelia had raised her from a child, and I knew the faithful old servant would lay down her life before she let any harm come to her "angel-child." And I wanted to be alone to think—to find some way out of the maze of ugly and hopeless thoughts seething in my brain. It had been a hot day for San Francisco; I stepped outside for a moment, hoping that with the evening a little breeze would be stirring—hoping a little fresh air would clear my thoughts.

On the marble floor of the front porch, I noticed a piece of orange-colored paper, curiously twisted into a hollow cylinder with both ends closed, so it resembled one of the exploding crackers children pull at Hallowe'en parties. I had found such pieces of paper there quite often, recently. They were the advertisements of some quack doctor or other—a Filipino, I gathered from the name: Ferman Villalobos. Previously, I had given them a mere glance, crumpled them up, thrown them away, but now, for some reason or other, I was moved to look at this particular slip of paper more closely. I stepped back into the hall, switched on the light because dusk was falling fast, and unrolled the handbill.

As I undid the paper, I noticed some insects—gnats or mosquitoes, I thought—flitting around the electric lamp, and so I

closed the front door to keep any more of the creatures outside. And then I stood there, reading seriously the prospectus of a Filipino who might be no better than a sorcerer, for all I knew . . . . That was what Estelle's affliction had done to me—that was the point to which I had been driven. I was ready to clutch at any straw—any figment of hope . . . .

The advertisement was printed in English and Spanish. Dr. Villalobos, it informed the reader, maintained his offices at number 211 McClintock Avenue. He was prepared, the circular further stated, to treat any disorder or illness—whether due to natural or other causes . . . .

Natural—or *other* causes . . . .

There was a time when I would have laughed at such ideas—discounted them utterly. But now?

Well, Dr. Westwood had been unable to help. Three or four others of the most prominent exponents of modern science had been unable to do anything to prevent an unreasoning madness from taking control of Estelle's will. Why not try the other thing . . . . ? There didn't seem to be much else left . . . .

I made my decision quickly. 211 McClintock—that should be only a couple of blocks away. I stepped outside, closed the door behind me.

ON THE sidewalk, I pushed through a sea of brown faces—Filipino faces, they were—with a little of Mongol in them, and sometimes a Negroid suggestion. They were mostly men—a Filipino woman is a rarity away from the islands—slender, curiously graceful creatures, gaudily dressed, their liquid eyes flashing in the light, their tongues chattering rapid Spanish.

Years ago, when my father had built the house that was now mine, this section had been quite select—even fashionable. But time has brought its changes to San

Francisco, as to every city, and this particular district was flooded by foreigners—first Portuguese, and then these were supplanted by Filipinos.

However, I felt no impulse to move away. I was attached to the house I had been raised in; it was comfortable and conveniently located, if a trifle dark and old-fashioned. And Estelle said she liked it too, when she came to live in it. As for the Filipinos, she thought them amusing. Living here reminded her of our honeymoon in the Far East—it would make all our life seem a honeymoon, she told me.

And so, I made my way up the street in the midst of this alien swarm without giving them any particular thought.

Number 211 . . . .

Dr. Villalobos proved to be very obliging indeed. He was a little man, with a skin so wrinkled and lined that it gave him an appearance of incredible age. And yet he moved briskly, almost spryly; there was nothing feeble about his walk. He told the Senor Trumbull, speaking like a Chinese talking fairly good English with a Spanish accent, that he would be only too glad to accompany him and undertake an examination of the Senora Trumbull's unfortunate illness . . . .

When I brought Dr. Villalobos into Estelle's room, Amelia's reaction was a little odd. She said nothing, but she rolled her eyes and pursed her lips at the sight of the Filipino as if she were confronted by a cobra or an adder. But I thought little of that at the moment. I was rather desperate, remember. I might have felt trusting toward the devil himself, if he had held out some hope of a cure for Estelle.

Gently, I roused her. I introduced her to the Filipino doctor, explained to her why I had brought him . . . .

After a moment, Dr. Villalobos had completed an examination much like the routine of an ordinary physician. He

straightened up—an odd figure in rusty but very formal attire—his wrinkled face expressionless, his strange Eastern eyes, with their odd animal quickness of movement, enigmatic.

"It is not—what you call—illness of the flesh. No, please. The Senora Trumbull—she is possessed of demon—of evil spirit. To cure, spirit must be cast out of body . . . ."

At that, Estelle's eyes were turned to me in alarm, in disbelief. I could not repress a frown of incredulity. "But—look here, man . . . ." I started to say.

Dr. Villalobos broke in with infinite politeness, but with the air of a man who is sure of his ground.

"To cure, spirit must be cast out of body," he repeated. "You have trying ways of American doctor, no? They have been useless, no? I am the Doctor Villalobos, please, I understanding wisdom of the East—wisdom of the jungle. I can cure where American Doctor have failure, where he can do nothing. You trying, please? To try not hurting—maybe you finding I help . . . ."

I set my jaw grimly. "All right," I said. "We'll try—anything . . . . What do you say, Estelle? Am I right?"

She nodded, faintly.

"The Senora," Dr. Villalobos informed us, "must for the treatment visiting office, please. Most necessary, Oh yes. Not far—the Senora Trumbull can walk?"

"I'll come," Estelle said. "Now—at once. You can take me now, Doctor?"

Dr. Villalobos bowed deeply. "If it is so the Senora desires . . . ."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hell's Physician

**F**IVE minutes later, we were ready to leave the house, to walk the two blocks up the street to Dr. Villalobos' office. I was the last to pass over the threshold.

Just as I was about to close the door, Amelia, the Negress, beckoned me back into the hall. I stepped inside again for a moment.

The black woman was excited, obviously. "Jes' a moment, Mister Phil. You gwine let that monkey-man get Miss Estelle in his place—you gwine do that?" Amelia's generic term for a Filipino was "monkey-man."

I nodded. "Got to do something, Amelia."

"Don't do it, Mister Phil," she said earnestly. "Ah tell you, he's bad medicine that man—he's debbil-medicine . . . ."

I turned to go, almost brusquely. "Devil-medicine, eh? Well, that may be what we need. The other kind hasn't done any good . . . ."

But then an odd change took place in Amelia. She drew herself up like a priestess—a black priestess from the jungles of Africa. Even in my distraught state I was somewhat impressed—I stayed when she laid her hand on my arm.

"Ah's warned you, Mister Phil," she said. "An' if any harm comes to her, it's up to you . . . . But this much you *got* to do—take this, keep it by you . . . ." She fumbled in her bosom, drew out a curious little disc of a bright metal like silver, pressed it into my hand . . . .

"Why—what on earth—" I began—but then she interrupted me.

"Debbil-charm, Mister Phil—don' forget you got it, if you're in danger. Voodoo man, he give it to me back years ago in Lou'siana . . . . Don' forget you got it, Mister Phil, an' don' you let Mis' 'Stelle out of your sight—not one minute . . . ."

I was going to protest, give her back the charm, but she looked so earnest, so impressive, that I said nothing, and slipped the silver disc in my pocket. "Anything to avoid an argument at this of all times," I told myself, in half-rationaliza-

tion, and turned and joined Estelle and Dr. Villalobos outside . . . .

And walking up the street, I was so much occupied with other thoughts that I forgot the whole incident . . . .

**D**R. VILLALOBOS' office was upstairs in a two-story building. He led us through the consultation room, where I had spoken with him earlier, to a strange chamber evidently designed as a surgery.

This place was a weird combination of a modern operating room and a museum of curiosities. In the center was a white-sheeted operating table, with the usual trays for instruments, and the usual basin with running water. But hanging from the ceiling and attached to the walls, was an unbelievable collection of—I suppose *objects* is the only word inclusive enough. There were mummified fish and reptiles of the most grotesque sort; there were tatters of cloth and bizarre patterns; there were human skulls, an embalmed hand, a bag of children's marbles, an ancient feather-duster, a mask inlaid with bits of glass and turquoise.

And there were savage weapons—many of them—barbarous blades and axes, some brightly gleaming, some blackened as if by dried blood . . . .

I wish I had obeyed my first impulse—turned back, taken Estelle away from that place. But, well, I have already said often enough how desperate we were . . . .

The Filipino made Estelle undress but for a sheer, thin slip of silk, and lie down on the operating table. Then he politely but definitely told me to go outside; to wait in the office.

But there I balked—I insisted on staying where I was.

At last Villalobos agreed that I might stay in the room. But he told me, I must not speak, on any account, nor interfere with anything that might happen. I ac-

quiesced, though for some reason my heart sank as I did so.

First of all the doctor clapped his hands, and from behind a curtain filed six Filipinos, naked but for loin-cloths and many strings of beads. They carried musical instruments—drums, one-stringed fiddles, a small flute . . . .

I gagged at that, though by an effort I held my peace, and remained standing by the wall where I was. I hadn't counted on anything of the sort. With a doctor, white or brown, it was different, but I couldn't quite stomach the idea of those naked brown men looking at Estelle as she lay there, golden, beautiful, only the sheerest silk over her body . . . . They *did* look, too—greedily, I thought, almost avidly.

But the doctor seemed to regard their presence as quite a matter of course. He gave them a signal, and then they squatted on their heels in a corner, and began to play. It was not loud music, but it was hypnotic, compelling, with its throb of drums, its whine of monotonous melody.

I could see Estelle's flesh shudder slightly, almost as if in sympathy with the beat of the music. I tried to hope, tried to fight down logical reason, to believe that in this hocus-pocus was our true salvation . . . .

**D**R. VILLALOBOS had put on a white starched coat, a garment as incongruous with the savage music, with the ritual he commenced to perform, as the operating table was with the rest of the room. With birdlike, quick movements, the Filipino capered about Estelle, muttering things to himself in a language I am sure was neither English nor Spanish.

This went on for a time—I am not sure how long, because my head was swimming with the thrumming of primitive music. Then Villalobos made another signal, and two more Filipinos, naked like the players,

entered, bearing large bowls from which a dense, sweet-smelling smoke rose voluminously. One of these was set at Estelle's feet, the other at her head.

These two naked men disappeared again; but while the doctor went on with his gibberish, and while blue smoke made the atmosphere heavy and indistinct, other Filipinos drifted into the room, one at a time, two by two, in groups of three or four—silent, catlike people, who formed ranks about all the four walls. These were dressed in their usual gaudy version of American clothes—but their faces were still alien, savage—no less than the faces of the nude musicians. They were silent; only I could see that forty, perhaps fifty pairs of murky brown eyes were fastened on Estelle's quivering form. Her eyes were half-closed; perhaps she was not even aware of their presence . . . .

Then for the first time, a new fear chilled my heart. Who were these spectators—whence did they come? Who had summoned them? They were pressing about me now so I could have moved only with difficulty—though I could easily see over their heads because of their short stature . . . .

The doctor seemed to sense that his audience was now complete, because he stopped short in his monotonous procedure. The music increased in tempo, the crowd leaned forward expectantly; and then the two men who had brought the incense appeared again.

One carried a short, gleaming knife. The other carried an immense white rooster. The bird darted its head about nervously, seemed to peer in every direction at once with beady yellow eyes.

With one motion, Dr. Villalobos seized Estelle's thin garment, ripped it from her body . . . . She lay there, all the perfection of her ripe young breasts, her slim golden body, exposed to the intent gaze of the brown men . . . .

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Exorcist or Sorcerer?*

**B**EFORE I could shout my protest, before I could struggle forward through the close-pressed bodies about me, Villalobos had taken the knife from one of the servants; from the other he took the white rooster, by the yellow scaly legs.

The bird seemed suddenly to sense its doom; it flapped its wings and screeched frightfully. But in Villalobos' hand the knife-blade twinkled, and then the rooster was without a head.

Blood shooting in a crimson stream splattered over Estelle's body, streaked her skin with bright pools and rivers. Still she did not move, she seemed stunned, hypnotized.

Villalobos' eyes blazed in his wrinkled face while he pronounced a final prayer; a murmur broke from the lips of the watchers; over the persistent music I could hear the sibilance of breath more swiftly drawn . . . .

I thought I saw hands swiftly making the sign of the Cross—but this was feverishly done, without reverence. If Christianity entered into this barbaric ritual, it was in a perverted, untrue form—as it enters into the rites of Voodoo among the American Negroes.

I managed to find my voice. "For God's sake," I shouted, "is it all done—can I take her away from this place . . . .?"

There was a hush, I could feel all those unwinking eyes fastened upon me where I stood.

"It is—done . . . ." Villalobos droned in his singsong voice. "The evil spirit has fled with the spirit of the white bird. I pronounce the Senora cured . . . ."

I tried to push forward. "Then—get these people away from here; let her get dressed again, let her put something over her body . . . ."



But Villalobos shook his head. "Not so fast, my friend. I have rendering great services to the Senora Trumbull—very great services. And for those I must be paid . . . ."

"Well," I said, impatiently, without realizing the implications in his tone, "Well, you can send the bill like other doctors, can't you? If all this has done any good, I'll pay you, and gladly . . . . Only, now I've got to get her home again . . . ."

"She is cured," Villalobos told me. "Of that you can feeling certain. But it is custom, in my country, that patient belongs to the doctor, until bill is paid . . . ."

I tried to fumble for my check-book. "All right," I snapped. "How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

I think I laughed. "All right," I said, "we'll joke some other time. I want to go now. She might catch cold . . . . *How much?*" I was getting nervous under the steady scrutiny of all those Oriental eyes.

"I have telling the Senor Trumbull," Dr. Villalobos said, no longer so graciously, "that bill is for ten thousand dollars, yes, please . . . ."

"You're crazy," I told him. "Why, I haven't got that much to my name—and if I did . . . ."

"Very well," Villalobos replied, calmly. "I have practising ancient art, I have performing cure on Senora Trumbull. The Senor Trumbull will not pay for same. Senora Trumbull becomes my property—she is property of Fernan Villalobos, yes, please . . . ."

That aroused something in me. I think I might have throttled the impertinent imp of a man if I could have got close to him. But as I started forward, any number of hands seized me. For a moment I thought I was going to break loose, fight my way through those tawny devils. But there were too many of them. I realized that it

was hopeless to struggle. They were little—but they were wiry, strong, lithe . . . .

They held me, but they could not gag me. "Why, you little yellow skunk—" I shouted at the doctor hoarsely—"How do I know you've cured her? And if you had—*ten thousand dollars!*—the greatest surgeon in the world wouldn't ask for that . . . ."

VILLALOBOS smiled briefly and held up a withered hand. I was silent then because I was speechless with anger.

"His wife is not worth so much to the Senor Trumbull?" he asked mockingly.

"If you've cured her with your hocus-pocus," I told him, "you can have all the money I own. But if it hasn't done any good, I'll turn you over to the police if it's the last thing I do . . . ."

"And how much money does the Senor Trumbull own . . . .?"

I could not name a very large sum; my bank account was rather low after the doctor bills I had already been forced to pay. Still, it seemed to me quite out of proportion to the services Dr. Villalobos had rendered.

"Two hundred dollars," I answered him.

The Filipino shook his head. "Sorry, please," he murmured. "Any man here will gladly paying two thousand for young lady. Do I speaking correctly, please?"

And from the throats of those fiends came a shout of assent—"Si, si—yes, yes . . . ." They would gladly pay Dr. Villalobos two thousand dollars for the young lady.

I tried to tell myself it was all an evil dream, but that smoke-filled den persisted before my eyes—the dreadful relics suspended from the ceiling, the press of Asiatics, the pitiful blood-drenched form of my Estelle lying silent on the operating table.

In desperation, I stopped trying to

argue. "All right, I'll pay *ten* thousand," I said. "I'll pay—anything . . . . Only let us out of here . . . ."

"You pay cash, yes?" hissed Villalobos.

How could I pay cash? I had a couple of dollars in my clothes; no more . . . .

The witch-doctor read the despair on my face and answered it with a smile. "In my country, cash is custom, please. I keeping the Senora Trumbull, I think . . . . She is what you call, beautiful, the Senora Trumbull. I think I getting plenty cash for the beautiful young lady . . . ."

I found my voice again at that. "Listen, you fool," I said, trying to talk evenly, "you don't think you can get away with a thing like that? This is San Francisco—this is nineteen thirty-six. You'd be lucky to get off with a life sentence, you and the others—lucky not to be lynched to a telephone pole . . . ."

But Dr. Villalobos seemed unimpressed. "Who you think telling police, I like to know, please? You think maybe *you* telling police, Senor Trumbull? You not care to do that after watching what I have to show you now. Close attention, please . . . ."

**H**E CLAPPED his hands; a servant brought in a couple of little images, about two feet high, made of beeswax or some such substance. They were roughly in the shape of men. With these before him on a small table, he clapped his hands again.

Now a man, a Filipino, was led in. His hands were bound; his face had the pallor and sullenness of one who has been kept a prisoner for a long time. When the fellow saw the wax images, he trembled visibly; the sullen expression he wore changed to one of abject fear. For the moment, the doctor paid him no attention.

"You observe, Senor Trumbull, this man. He had the misfortune to displeasing secret Filipino society of which I have

honor to be president . . . . In meeting last month, sentence of death was passed for him, yes, please . . . . And now, if you will regarding closely . . . ."

Several men held the prisoner motionless for a moment while Villalobos snipped off a lock of his long black hair with the sharp knife he had used to kill the rooster. Then the sorcerer fastened the hair with a grotesque rakishness to the head of one of the wax images, while he spoke a few words in some weird language.

The prisoner was released now, he was left to stand quaking by himself in the center of the room.

I noticed with horror that Estelle was beginning to awaken from her stupor; she watched with wide eyes and stretched lips the procedure that was commencing.

In their corner, the musicians began to play again—to resume the music they had left off when the incantation of the white rooster was complete. The drums pulsed evilly, compellingly.

All eyes were turned on Villalobos and the wax figure with the culprit's hair attached to it. The witch-doctor lighted a wax taper, and slowly applied the flame to one of the arms of the effigy before him.

At the same instant, the condemned man—though no one had come near him—gave a terrible scream; his face writhed with the contortions of intense suffering . . . .

Need I describe in detail the appalling scene that followed? Need I dwell on the shrieks of that doomed victim, the demonic death-lust of the crowd—and most terrible of all for me, the expression Estelle wore as she watched, fascinated . . . .?

Let this suffice: after ten or fifteen minutes, the wax figure was reduced to a shapeless mass; the victim lay dead on the floor, twisted and contorted fright-

fully; and Estelle had buried her face in her arms and was convulsively sobbing.

**M**Y FACE must have been racked, haunted—and yet after that demoniac exhibition was over, Villalobos could still face me with his damnable smile. To the men standing close to me, the doctor murmured something in Spanish; and they held me tight with their wiry arms, forced my head forward, while he advanced with his gleaming, blood-stained knife.

I remember I strained like a madman; I remember the sound of Estelle's scream tearing through my brain—and then there was a little pull at a lock of my hair . . . .

And that was all. Villalobos had what he wanted; I was allowed to straighten up again where I stood. I watched while he fastened the hair that had been on my head to the head of the wax image that was left.

"And now," purred Villalobos, "the Senor Trumbull is free to go—or stay, as he wishes. Only, it is—how do you say?—it is the understanding that the Senora Trumbull is my property. I have making the cure of her illness; she belong to me. And if the Senor Trumbull calling the police—or in any way bringing about my displeasure . . . ." Villalobos took up the taper again and brought the flame dangerously near the wax effigy that remained—the one with my hair on it. I winced involuntarily, after what I had seen, and Estelle moaned pitifully. But then the witch-doctor blew out the flame.

"I will only warn the Senor," continued Villalobos, "that where ever he is, he dies, horribly, when this little figure melting . . . . And figure is mine, please—mine to treat as I wish . . . ." He clapped his hands commandingly, and then the two naked servants carried out the corpse of the man we had just seen killed.

Villalobos was no longer paying any

attention to me. He was addressing the crowd in general. He spoke Spanish—a language I have never learned to speak fluently, but am able to understand well enough from having studied it as a school-boy, and having spent a couple of months in Mexico City at one time.

"*Amigos y hermanos*—friends and brothers," he addressed the fellow members of the order (by this time it was plain to me that this gathering was nothing more nor less than that: the meeting of a Filipino secret society or cult). "Friends and brothers, as you have just witnessed, a beautiful piece of property has come into my hands. However, I am no longer a young man—the days of my greatest ardor and passion are no more. Therefore, I see fit, rather than to enjoy this prize myself, to dispose of it for the good of our brotherhood. The lovely Senora Trumbull belongs to the highest bidder among you, without reservation, and the purchase price is to be devoted to the benefit of our glorious Society . . . ."

**I** FELT a shiver along my spine at that little speech; but among the Filipinos there was a murmur of approval at the doctor's generosity.

Poor Estelle had ceased her heavy sobbing. She looked about her now with quick, frightened glances—glances that were met in every direction by the hungry, steadfast gaze of alien eyes. Calmly, dispassionately, as if she were indeed no more than a piece of lifeless property, Villalobos praised her beauty and desirability.

I ground my teeth and twisted my fingers in helpless anguish as that obscene witch-doctor lifted Estelle's shimmering silken hair with claw-like fingers, and let it fall again in a bright shower over her shoulders and breasts; as he tilted her unwilling chin to show the splendid line of her throat; as he followed the line of

her blood-stained but none-the-less delicate body with a provocative gesture. I could almost find it in my heart to wish that she had succumbed to the suicide madness; for even if Villalobos' barbaric ritual had cured her, the fate that confronted her was a living death—or worse . . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Beauty's Auction

THE bids began high, and rapidly the stake grew larger. Two thousand—five thousand—seven—nine—ten . . . . Ten thousand dollars for a white girl—skin golden as the sun, eyes blue as the sky, hair silver as the moon . . . .

The contest, by this time, had naturally narrowed down to three or four men; even among the members of this society, which was obviously made up of the wealthier class of Filipinos, ten thousand dollars was a great deal of money.

The bid went up to fifteen thousand dollars, and then no more offers were heard. Then a slender man, with a face flat and triangular as an adder's head, with narrow eyes in which smouldered unspeakable things, with lips twisted in a line cruel as it was concupiscent, handed over to Dr. Villalobos a fistfull of money as if it were so much green waste-paper . . . .

The sorcerer's voice concluding the bargain was almost drowned out by the roar of the crowd: "Sold—sold to Brother Luis Camalunes—sold at fifteen thousand pesos . . . ."

That obscene devil who had "purchased" Estelle stepped forward, seized her where she crouched on the operating table, drew her toward him. He was going to press his evil lips on her lovely young mouth . . . .

Then Estelle cried out, piteously, desperately: "Phil—for God's sake . . . . Help me, Phil . . . ."

A resolution cold as ice came over me then. With a set jaw and lowered head I was going to charge through these Filipinos, snatch her away from the creature who was fawning on her so horribly.

But then Estelle screamed again: "Stop—stay away from me, Phil . . . . I tell you, stay away!"

Dr. Villalobos had lit his taper again. He was slowly bringing the flame close to the wax figure which bore a lock of my hair on its head. In the witch-doctor's eyes was a look of indescribable ugliness.

And I—God help me—I stopped dead in my tracks. I had seen that other man writhe in anguish where he stood, without a hand laid on him, while a little doll of wax melted before fire. I think I would gladly have gone through anything to save Estelle—but how could I have helped her while the searing flames of some unspeakable black art were destroying my very life?

And Estelle, in a very ecstasy of fear, for my sake now, not her own, called to Villalobos to stop. And as that flame ruthlessly came nearer the wax image, my beloved one turned her face deliberately, willingly, to the man who had paid for her soul with money. She pressed her young, yielding body, so pitiful with the streaks of blood on the naked flesh, and yet still so beautiful, close to the body of Luis Camalunes. And before my eyes, with love on her face that was indescribably fair because I knew it was love for me, she kissed him . . . . Warmly, passionately, she kissed a man who despite his American clothes was nothing more nor less than a jungle savage . . . .

ONLY then did Dr. Villalobos extinguish his flaming taper again, while he looked at me with dreadful meaning in his eyes.

If only, I told myself, if only I had some weapon to fight back with, some occult defense of my own against this damnable sorcery . . . .

And then out of the darkness of my subconscious mind came the flicker of a memory—something that took shape, became real. I recalled how the Negrees, Amelia, had stopped me as I was leaving the house to bring Estelle to this fiend's den. I remembered how she had given me a silver talisman, how she had begged me to use it if danger threatened. Perhaps. . . .

The thought was so impossible that I shrank from it; and yet it grew on me. Perhaps, in that silver disc was some mysterious power of the rites of Voodoo—perhaps I could summon up forces from the dark heart of Africa that would overcome the lore of Asia . . . .

I felt in my pocket. There it was—cold, smooth metal. I drew it out, my heart pounding, my breath coming fast.

And then, so all could see, I held the silver talisman aloft, while I gave a shout to attract attention.

The effect was astounding. A murmur of fear, of consternation, swelled in the throats of the crowd until it was almost a cry—then they were suddenly silent, covering their faces as if against a blinding light. And yet, so far as I could see, what I held in my hand was a mere slip of white metal.

As for Villalobos, he gave voice to a sound that was neither a groan nor a cry—I should call it a dry croak of fear.

I was bewildered; and yet I determined instantly that I must not lose this mysterious advantage I had gained so suddenly. Extending the silver disc before me, I advanced on Villalobos where he cowered in the center of the room. And as I did so, the brown men stepped back from my path hastily, as if they feared my very touch.

The place was silent. The music had stopped dead the moment I showed that

curious metal symbol; there remained only the sound of hushed breathing.

Villalobos backed away from me, with a look of the most hideous fear on his withered face. If I had threatened him with a bottle of acid or a loaded gun, he could not have been more terrified. Through the smoke-blue atmosphere of that den of evil, his eyes glowed like the eyes of a tortured animal.

Back and still back that miserable creature scurried before my advance; back until he collided with the trophy-hung wall of his lair. Then, desperately, his hands scrabbled and clawed at a great piece of tattered silk suspended there—as if he would find room in its folds to conceal himself from the talisman he so feared . . . .

But the refuge Dr. Villalobos found was not what he expected. It was the final refuge of every living creature, instead.

Fastened in front of the silken hanging was a great iron battle-axe, the massive, razor-sharp work of some Igorot head-hunter's savage jungle forge. Of the many weapons hung about the room, this was the most ominous, the most deadly . . . .

As Villalobos' hands jerked at the silk fabric, the battle-axe came loose from its fastening. Down it crashed, a glittering doom that split the wretched man's skull as easily as I have seen a kitchen-knife in a child's hand split a ripe melon . . . .

Thank God, Estelle had been spared the sight of that final horror. She had fainted—her head lay back, her bright hair streamed over the end of the operating table.

I paused only long enough to pull off the lock of my hair Villalobos had fastened to his wax effigy, and then smash the thing to bits.

Then I took Estelle in my arms, the white covering of the operating table

draped around her nude body, and went out of the Hell's chamber without another look behind me.

Thank heaven, among the swarm of Filipino faces outside, I saw the bluff countenance of a white man—an Irish policeman patrolling his beat. I staggered up to him with my pathetic burden. "Ambulance," I managed to gasp. "For God's sake, ambulance. And riot squad—better call for that, too . . . . Upstairs, number 211 . . . ." I think I went out, then—at least, I remember nothing more after that.

I CAME to my senses again before Estelle did. We were in the medical ward of the central police station. Dr. Barrett, the police surgeon, a brusque but kindly old man, told me I had nothing to worry about. "Just give the girl time, she'll be all right . . . . I don't know—may be a few minutes, may be half an hour. Can't hurry it. You can talk to me while we're waiting, if it'll make you feel any easier . . . ."

And so I told Dr. Barrett everything, from the beginning. It helped, somehow, to talk.

When I'd finished, the old surgeon turned a pair of sharp blue eyes on me, eyes in which I suspected a twinkle.

"Thought you'd have a try at black magic, did you, son—after you found out how much the big-shot psychologists and doctors *didn't* know about medicine? Bad guess—a few good doses of quinine will do the trick for your wife, all right."

"Quinine?" I echoed, puzzled.

"Specific for *dengue* fever. Not a dangerous disease in itself, but it produces such depression in the patient that he's liable to do anything. Came across lots of it when I served on the medical corps in the Philippines during the war with Spain, used to call it suicide fever in those days. Odd, though, how she could have got it

in San Francisco—the mosquito that spreads it must have been introduced here artificially . . . ."

Then my mind flashed back to the odd way Dr. Villalobos' orange paper advertisements had been rolled, and I remembered seeing mosquitoes flying around the lamp in the hall when I opened that last one to read it. It was all clear to me then.

The Filipino had seen my wife when she first moved into my house, had planned to get her in his power. White women were in great demand among members of his race, I knew. And so with devilish cunning the man had contrived to give her a rare tropical disease that would baffle doctors; he knew that in desperation we would read one of his circulars and come to him for help. And his scheme had come so close to success that I shuddered to think of it . . . .

I told Dr. Barrett of all this; and then I went on to ask him about one or two things that were still not plain to me. "But if he got those bugs into our house rolled up in his paper circulars, why did they bite only Estelle—why not me? Why not our Negro servant?"

"Count out the Negro," Dr. Barrett said. "Lots of things that will floor white people don't touch them at all. As for you, young man, you're mostly away from home during the day—right? Well, that accounts for it. *Culex Fasciatus*, the mosquito of this variety of *Dengue* fever, bites only in the day time. They buzz around in the dark, but they don't bite. Anything else you don't see?"

"I see that part of the business, all right. But what about that wax figure—how could Villalobos kill a man by melting a doll with some of the man's hair on its head?"

"He couldn't," Dr. Barrett promptly answered. "Old trick of savage medicine-men, that. They'll select some victim, give him a poison they know will hit him at a

specific time, without his knowing it. Then with everybody watching, they melt their little figure just as the poison gets him. Good way to make the others behave—they think he can do the same thing to them, too.”

I gulped at that, to think how neatly Villalobos had tricked me. Now there remained only one other thing I didn't understand. I took the silver disc Amelia had given me, and showed it to Dr. Barrett.

“What about this?” I asked. “It's probably the simplest thing to explain of all, but why should a piece of silver given me by an ignorant old Negress scare a bunch of blood-crazed, sex-mad savages out of their wits—why should such a thing do what it did to a clever scoundrel like Villalobos? What has the magic of Africa to do with the black art of the Orient?”

Dr. Barrett looked at the object closely. It was simply a piece of flat silver, a couple of inches in diameter, with some haphazard marks engraved on the surface. That was all . . . .


The old surgeon shook his head. His

eyes were quite grave, now. “Young man,” he said, “you'd better ask the Negress who gave this to you to explain it. Maybe she can; maybe not. I know I can't explain it. I've seen a good deal of the world in my time, had considerable contact with primitive races. And I know most of their magic and sorcery is pure trickery—nothing but a clever deception. But there's still something left over—an undercurrent of mystery and power you can't account for. It's too much for me. I'm not afraid to admit that. It's too much for me.” He gave me back the talisman and got up abruptly and went over to the cot where Estelle lay motionless. “I think she'll open her eyes in a minute,” he said to me over his shoulder.

You, who read this, may laugh at me for a superstitious dupe, but I am not ashamed to say that I fingered that piece of silver with something close to reverence—something approaching awe, as I let it slide into my pocket again.

But for that slip of metal, I might never have looked again into those blue eyes, those glorious eyes, that in a moment would return my gaze . . . .

**THE END**




All Henleyville accused Jerry's father, Doctor Eustace Caldwell, of stealing the village babes — and sending them home jibbering idiots. But when Jerry sought to stem the rushing tide of terror-crazed townsmen, he saw his own sister fleeing through the night, clutching to her breast—a kidnapped child! Read this novel of almost unbelievable horror and mystery in the Feb.-Mar. Issue of **HORROR STORIES!**

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# Satan Sends His Mistress

By Paul Ernst

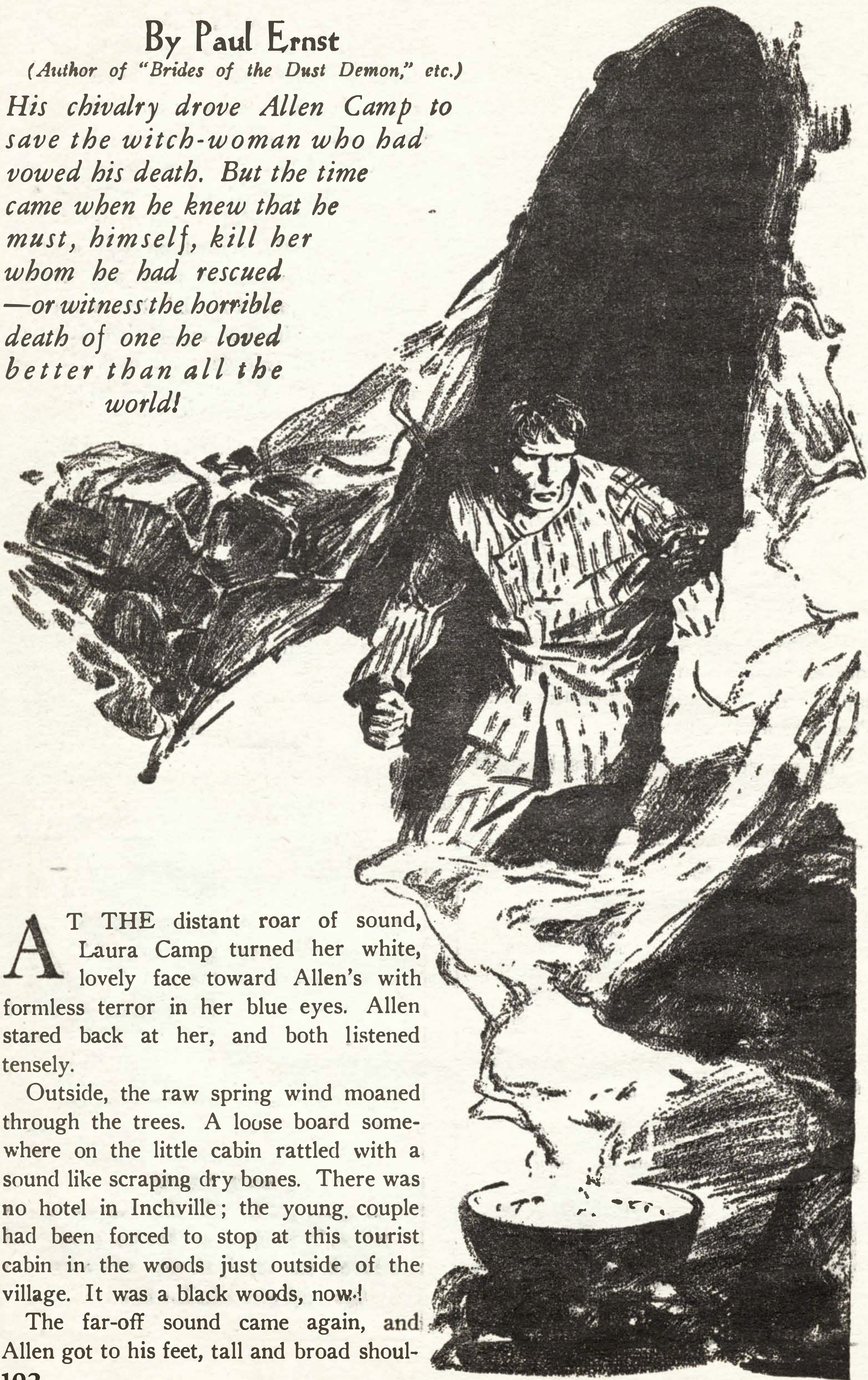
(Author of "Brides of the Dust Demon," etc.)

*His chivalry drove Allen Camp to save the witch-woman who had vowed his death. But the time came when he knew that he must, himself, kill her whom he had rescued—or witness the horrible death of one he loved better than all the world!*

**A**T THE distant roar of sound, Laura Camp turned her white, lovely face toward Allen's with formless terror in her blue eyes. Allen stared back at her, and both listened tensely.

Outside, the raw spring wind moaned through the trees. A loose board somewhere on the little cabin rattled with a sound like scraping dry bones. There was no hotel in Inchville; the young couple had been forced to stop at this tourist cabin in the woods just outside of the village. It was a black woods, now!

The far-off sound came again, and Allen got to his feet, tall and broad shoul-





## An Eerie Novelette of Spine-Tingling Menace

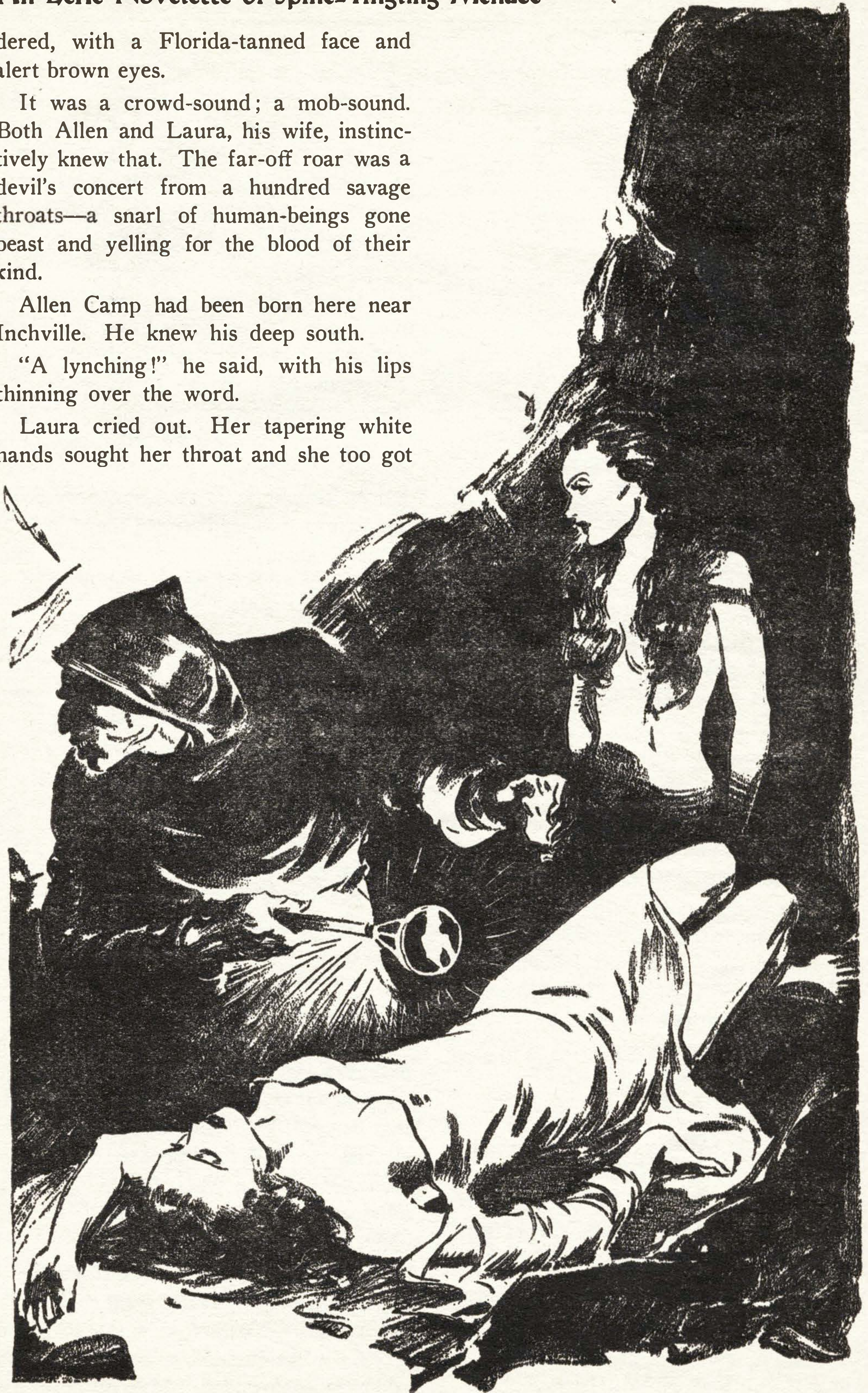
dered, with a Florida-tanned face and alert brown eyes.

It was a crowd-sound; a mob-sound. Both Allen and Laura, his wife, instinctively knew that. The far-off roar was a devil's concert from a hundred savage throats—a snarl of human-beings gone beast and yelling for the blood of their kind.

Allen Camp had been born here near Inchville. He knew his deep south.

"A lynching!" he said, with his lips thinning over the word.

Laura cried out. Her tapering white hands sought her throat and she too got



to her feet. She was as beautiful as a statue—and as rigid.

“Allen!”

“I’m afraid that’s what it is, darling. Only one thing can bring that note to human shouts.”

“Some poor Negro. . . .”

“Probably!” The word clipped from Allen’s lips. “And like as not he’s innocent.”

He was shrugging into his topcoat. He got his hat, lying on top of the suitcases which had not been unpacked because in the morning they intended to go right to the Camp ancestral home—the old plantation manor which had been in the process of being remodelled all winter for their arrival in early spring.

“Darling! Where are you going?”

“I’m going to visit the lynching party,” Allen said grimly.

“Allen! You can’t do anything! The danger—”

Allen put his hat on his well-shaped head.

“The Camp family has been a power in this section for a hundred years. The name, I think, still means something. I am not known personally here, but the natives know I own Camp Acres, and have a bit of money and influence. I’m going to see if I can’t save whatever poor devil it is they have out there.”

Laura got into her fur coat. “I’m going with you.”

“Oh, no, darling—”

“Oh, yes, Allen. The Southerner is chivalrous. You’ve told me so yourself, many times. You’re going to anger these men a lot, but they may be slower to attack you if your wife is by your side.”

“You think I’d hide behind a woman’s skirts?” demanded Allen savagely.

“You’re going to in this case—if the woman can manage it! Hurry . . . .”

THEY got out the door of the little cabin. To the south, perhaps half a mile away, they saw the red glow of a fire. It shone through the black limbs of the trees, as yet leafless, like the fires of hell through skeleton lattice-work.

“That way! My God—what do they intend to do? Burn him alive?”

They started forcing a way through the woods. They didn’t know the roads well enough to attempt to drive by some circuitous road to the point where the flames roared.

The underbrush tore at them. The roaring of a mob gone mad sounded ever louder in their ears. And now they could see figures moving between them and the flames—figures like that of fiends outlined as a black frieze against the fire.

“Hurry!” sobbed Laura.

Allen only nodded, biting his lips, stumbling forward at a run. He had seen what Laura had seen: two of the black figures moving toward the flames with a third struggling between them. And then they burst from the underbrush into a small clearing, in the center of which the great fire burned. And they stopped there a moment with the blood running cold in their veins.

Three or four score of men were in the clearing. Some were in stained overalls, some in the wrinkled store clothes which the country workman puts on after the day’s labor is done. All watched with savage faces the two husky fellows who were bearing the victim toward the leaping flames. Even the trees around the clearing seemed to droop to watch that scene, shaking a little in the moaning wind as though shuddering at what was about to be done.

In the cleared semi-circle before the fire was deeply driven a great post, with chain on it. Toward this post, around which the burning embers could be pushed when the chains confined human flesh, the

two big men dragged their screaming burden.

"Good God!" exclaimed Allen Camp.

That burden, that victim, was a woman.

Screaming and writhing, she fought the relentless hands that bore her toward a flaming death. An old woman, a hag, with lank hair flying around a bony face, and with deep-sunken eyes wild in the firelight.

Allen sprang toward the two, with Laura close behind. He jumped between them and the flame. And from sheer surprise, the roaring of the men around died down to electric silence. In the silence they glared at the man and woman, with eyes like the eyes of mad beasts.

Allen had an automatic in his pocket. He dared not draw it. At such a time the show of a weapon is far worse than an appearance of helplessness. This mob would tear him and Laura to pieces at the sight of a gun.

"What is the meaning of this?" Allen's incisive voice bit coldly into the deathly silence. "Are you all stark mad? Who is the leader here?"

After a moment's hesitation, a middle-aged man in clean though faded overalls stepped forward. The men around and behind him watched with flaming eyes. The two who held the old hag glared too, holding the thin, veined wrists of their captive without effort.

"I guess you'd call me the leader," the man in faded overalls drawled. His low voice was icy; his face was a stony mask.

"Leader of a lynching mob!" Allen said bleakly. "It's a high privilege, I must say . . . . Leader of a crowd of men who are about to burn a helpless old woman at the stake! Are you hell's leader, or a man?"

**T**HE farmer's icy face didn't change. "A man, I guess, stranger."

"You have a strange way of showing

your manhood." Allen's voice lashed like a whip. It sounded more fearless than he felt, inside. He had put himself and Laura in a spot when he interfered with this grim business. He knew it, and his mind raced alertly to try to feel the tension of the mob and perhaps direct it a little. "What has this old woman done that you dare even think of putting her to the stake?"

Now the others grew savagely impatient.

"Slug him!" one shouted. Other cries followed.

"Give him and his woman the same dose if they don't git out of here!"

"Who the hell is the guy, anyway?"

Allen caught up the last question. He raised his hand. For an instant he did not know whether the surging mob would crush over him and Laura at once, or would pause for just an instant, in indecision, to hear him out. The pendulum swung the right way. They paused.

"I'm no stranger," Allen called. "At least, my name is not strange in these parts, though I have not been here for many years. I am Allen Camp, last descendant of the Raleigh Camps, who own the great plantation two miles west."

There was silence again at that, while men looked at each other and then back at the tall, broad-shouldered man who stood between their victim and the fire.

Camp! Allen had literally wagered his life and Laura's that it was still a name to conjure with in the county of which Inchtville, Georgia, was the seat.

And for the moment at least he had won.

"Camp, eh?" drawled the stony-faced farmer. "No, son, I don't guess you're exactly a stranger. But you're buttin' in business that don't concern you."

"It does concern me," retorted Allen. "It concerns me as it does you—as loyal residents of Georgia. If you go through

with this awful thing, you'll put a blot on Georgia's name that won't fade out in a century! Why are you doing this to her, anyway?"

The icy-faced leader stared at the hag drooping in the clutch of the two men, and then back at Allen.

"We're burnin' her because she's a witch," he said evenly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Candidate for the Stake

**F**OR an instant Allen didn't think he had heard right.

"A *what?*" he repeated at last, mouth open.

"Witch! She's killed, and sent souls to damnation. The last was your own cousin, Abel Camp, eight months ago."

For a second, Allen paused, while curiosity raised its head even at such a time. His cousin, Abel Camp! Abel *had* died eight months before; it was his death that had brought Allen, now inheritor of Camp Acres, down here at last with his bride.

But what was this strange statement that the hag shrinking back from the flames had something to do with Abel's death?

Allen dismissed it, and marshalled cold logic.

"Witch! I won't argue with you about the possibility of such creatures. I'll only ask you to state how you know she is guilty of my cousin's death—or of any man's death."

"Abel Camp's mare kicked him to death," said the farmer.

"Then if an animal killed him, you can't accuse—"

The farmer's gnarled forefinger pointed at the crone.

"She done it. She was in the mare. Her spirit lived in the mare's body."

The pressure of Laura's hand cut short the wrathful words on Allen's lips. He read the pressure rightly: This was no time to combat superstition with logic, to try to argue a crowd of maddened men from the ugly paths of black legend. He had best ignore that part.

"Listen," he said, with his voice heard by all in the clearing. "You have accused this woman of killing my cousin. *My* cousin! Don't you think, under the circumstances, I should have the decision as to her sentence?"

"No!" yelled one of the two who held the crone.

But Allen heard, and was puzzled by, a lower exclamation which came from nearer at hand.

"*Him—tryin' to save—her!* That's funny. That's damned funny!"

The bleak-faced farmer spoke.

"You ain't quite as familiar with these parts as others of your name, Mr. Allen Camp. If you were, you'd go along now and let us finish this business. This—this witch has done wrong to more of your family than just Abel Camp. It's the Camps that have suffered most of all from her."

Allen's mind squeezed quickly into the opening.

"Then if my family is the chief sufferer, it is up to me, the last male member of it, to judge this woman," he cracked out. "There is no denying that reasoning. Is there?"

There was no reply. Stubborn, but calmer, the scores of men in the ghastly clearing stared at each other.

"*Is there?*"

The stony-countenanced farmer shrugged and spoke.

"The witch deserves to die. She ought to have her black soul cleaned in the fire. But I guess it's up to you to judge her. . . ."

Allen promptly stepped to the two big

men who held the hag. Laura walked with him. In her blue eyes was pride in her husband and his leadership.

"Then my judgment is that you let this woman go free." His voice rang in the clearing. And there was an authority in his bearing that backed up his tone.

The two men glared at him, and then at the farmer leader. Finally, biting their lips, they released the crone.

She fell at their feet, senseless with relief.

ALLEN bent over her. Beside him, the man in faded overalls bent too. The man, at Allen's glance, stolidly helped him lift her. The crone's body was unbelievably light; it felt as though her bones, almost wholly undraped with flesh, must be hollow as a bird's bones are.

"Where does she live?" said Allen.

Stolidly the farmer nodded. "Down that path a spell. She has a hut in the woods."

"We'll take her home." Allen faced the baffled mob. "You men came near doing a thing so frightful that you'd never sleep nights again. You'd better go, now."

They moved slowly toward several paths leading from the clearing. As they walked, their eyes kept on Allen's form, with the shriveled body of the woman they had so absurdly accused of being a witch, in his arms. And in their eyes was a curious look.

Allen caught that look, and saw it again in the eyes of the farmer striding beside him, just before they left the flickering light of the clearing.

The farmer gave the key to it, after a moment.

"You'd have done better to let her die at the stake," he said somberly.

Allen only looked at him.

"Funny you don't know your own family history better," the man said. "This old hag's killed three Camp men, over a

thirty-year spell. Every Camp man she could get near, she swore, she's send to death—and his woman with him."

Allen shook his head bewilderedly, as he strode along the faint path with the unconscious old figure in his arms. Laura came behind.

"That woman's name is Sarah Fling," the farmer said.

"Sarah Fl—" Allen began, still bewildered. Then he stopped as memory quickened a little.

It had happened just before he was born. And it had concerned his uncle, Henry Camp. He remembered the story only vaguely.

Henry Camp had become infatuated with the beautiful though illiterate, daughter of a poor family. Poor white trash, really. He had finally jilted her, unable to leap the social barrier between her family and the aristocratic Camp clan.

The girl's name. . . . Yes, it had been Sarah Fling.

And now. . . . this aged, hideous bundle in his arms. . . .

"It's the girl your uncle done wrong," nodded the farmer, who had been watching his face. "A damn witch, even then. She vowed she'd get even with the Camps. She'd kill every male in the family, and their women too. And she's got 'em all but you, startin' with your uncle."

More hazy family history was coming back to Allen.

"But my uncle died in an accident. He and his wife were killed in a runaway—"

"Sure. Sarah Fling made the runaway. Her black soul had driv' out the spirit of the mare between the shafts of the buggy. She twisted it over a ravine, gettin' out of harness herself so she wouldn't be dragged after it."

Allen heard Laura's gasp, half amused and half hysterical, behind them. The man went on.

"Your cousin Barber Camp died in 'an

accident' too. A cow hooked him to death."

"I suppose," said Allen expressionlessly, "that the soul of Sarah Fling was in the cow?"

The farmer shrugged. "She was a mild beast always, till that afternoon. Then—no reason at all. Just turned on Barber and crushed him ag'in a fence post, and afterwards hooked him to pieces. Same afternoon she caught Mrs. Barber Camp and killed her. And eight months ago she was in the mare that kicked your cousin Abel to death. She'd have got the rest of the Camp men, only they went to the north, and to cities, like your dad—and died there, away from her spells."

Allen could have laughed, partly with relief from the strain of that mob scene, partly because of the excruciating humor of a grown adult believing the rot this man was uttering. But he didn't laugh.

"At least," he said solemnly, "Sarah Fling only kills us Camps. She doesn't consign our souls to the devil."

THE man beside him was silent for a moment. Then he said: "You're grinnin' at me, inside. But you'll learn. She does send the souls of you all—to hell. She does it with a kiss, temptin' Camp men to love her, and giving them over to the devil with an embrace. After that, she kills their bodies like she killed their souls."

"She tempts us with a kiss?" said Allen. He looked down at the flaccid face of the crone who had so nearly died that most frightful of all deaths. "Her face doesn't look very tempting."

"She don't come after a Camp man lookin' like that," said the farmer somberly. "She takes on her girl's handsomeness. She was a handsome wench, thirty-odd years ago. She shucks off her age and becomes like she was then."

"She must truly be a witch, then,"

Allen retorted, with a solemnity that made the farmer glance suspiciously at him.

And then they were at a hovel in the woods that seemed as wild as any lair of a beast. It was scarcely more than a windowless mound of stone, with earth over it. In the earth, dank plant-things had rooted, so that the hovel was green with the growth. A scarred, heavy door opened into the one small room. The farmer opened it.

They strode inside. There was a rusted small stove, with a pipe running up through the roof at a crazy angle, a broken-backed chair, a pallet of rags and straw on the floor for a bed; and, everywhere, little bundles of dried herbs. That was all.

Allen laid the old woman down on the filthy pallet. The farmer stared at him.

"Funny *you* should've save *her!*" he echoed the sentence back in the mob. "You've only saved her to die yourself. Because she'll kill you, mister, after she's damned you with a kiss. As for your woman—"

He looked at Laura Camp, then swung on his heel and left the hovel.

When the door had clattered shut behind him, Laura sank to her knees beside the aged woman. Her red-rimmed old eyelids were still closed.

"Poor soul," Laura said. "Imagine grown men believing that a feeble creature like this is guilty of—of transferring her spirit into others' bodies and killing people! Abysmal ignorance! And it would have caused her death at that hideous stake if we hadn't come along."

Her eyes shone as she looked up at Allen.

"You were pretty fine, back there, darling."

"But I've only preserved a force that will be the death of me, if our friend spoke the truth," Allen laughed.

Laura stared down at the woman.

"Poor old soul! I wonder if she still really hates the Camps, after being thrown over by one of them so long ago. It would be natural, I suppose. But anyway, you've cancelled the debt by saving her life. She couldn't possibly hate you—"

The crone's eyes slowly opened. Without luster, dead looking, somehow disturbing, the rheumy orbs turned up at the two young folks bending over her, then centered on the face of Allen. The way she had opened them hinted that she had not been unconscious for quite as long as they had supposed.

"So you are a Camp man," she said. Her voice was rusty, eerie. "Yes, I can see. You have the face, the bearing. And you are big, good looking. The handsome Camp men—with their black hearts. . . . Get out of my house."

Allen and Laura shrank back from the weird blaze that had sprung into the hag's filmy eyes with the final screeched words.

"Get out, I say! And may the devil curse you and your wench! And the devil will, man of the Camps! He will! You'll see! Get out before I tear the eyes from your face—"

Laura and Allen left the hovel. There was nothing else to do. The crone was on her knees, shaking as though about to have a fit, with sheer insanity burning in her sunken eyes and forming white foam-flecks on her flaccid lips.

They got out, and Allen shut the door behind them. They walked slowly toward the tourist cabin they had left thirty hectic minutes before.

"So she couldn't possibly hate me," Allen grinned easily to Laura. "My saving her life has cancelled the debt! She gave a good imitation of hating me, then. But it doesn't matter. What does count is the fact that we saved a poor, demented old woman from being burned to death."

Laura did not smile back. Her eyes were wide, queer looking.

"That old woman is a powerful person," she said slowly: "There is—something in her eyes. . . . Allen, hold my hand. Tight!"

"Good heavens!" Allen exclaimed. "You aren't really—You don't think she is a witch!" He laughed, loud and clear, in the night. "Do you think she can go about in animal form, and consign souls to hell with a kiss, and become young and beautiful, at will?"

Laura did not laugh with him. Her lips twisted. She did not speak for a long time.

"Of course there is no such creation as a witch," she said finally. "But she . . . . Allen, I felt when I looked at her as I did once when I saw a deadly spider in a glass cage at the zoo. Hold my hand tighter, darling. . . ."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Home of the Cursed

FIRST thing next morning Laura and Allen went to the great plantation house, modernized and remodeled into a stately and beautiful home with many thousands of dollars Allen had inherited from his father. There was heat in the house now, and a servant or two to prepare the food they had got from the Inchville store after leaving the tourist cabin. They hadn't wanted to go, last night, to a shut-up, cold house; they had preferred to approach it for the first time by daylight.

The morning, however, was not very enhancing. It was cold and raw. Rain threatened constantly; now and then came down in misty drizzles. The dirt lane from the highway to the big front porch with its two-story pillars was dotted with puddles.

Allen sighed.

"I remembered the place from my child-

hood as being so lovely. But it doesn't look that way now."

"It's beautiful," said Laura. "The clouds and rain are what make it seem so—so bleak."

A man stood on the porch. Allen greeted him as Robert Parker. A Parker had served the Camps since the first had come to be overseer on the original plantation in slave times. This one, the grandson of that other, had promised to stay on and work for Allen when he came down. To him Allen had entrusted the job of getting a woman to cook and take care of the interior of the house.

"Welcome, Mr. Camp," Parker said. He was a thin, wiry man with an open though not too intelligent face. "But it ain't so much welcome as it might be. I heard about last night."

Allen looked sharply at him. He had an idea that he had seen Parker in that clearing last night! But he couldn't be sure, and the man's eyes were unwavering enough.

"I was glad I happened along at the right time," he said.

"I guess it was for the best," mumbled Parker. "Though, mark my words, somebody'll kill that old witch—and soon! She ain't fit to live."

Allen brusquely introduced Laura as the new mistress of the Camp home, and then the woman Parker had got for them came out. She was about thirty-eight, apparently, with a slightly heavy figure and dead-looking, bleached yellow hair that did not go with her dark brown eyes.

She curtsied to Laura, and went up the stairs with two of their lighter bags. And Laura and Allen looked over the house.

Twelve rooms, it had been nicely decorated and remodeled. They were quite pleased.

"We'll live here all year round except

in summer for a couple of months," Allen decided. "Then we can go to New York, or Maine, for coolness—"

He felt rather than heard the maid behind him. Alice Carey, she had called herself. He turned.

"Well, Alice?"

He thought he saw fear in her eyes; but not, he divined, fear for herself. It seemed, oddly that she feared for him.

"There's coffee, sir," was all she said. "I thought you'd have breakfast in town, but maybe would want a cup of hot coffee when you got here."

"Fine," said Laura, leading the way to the dining room.

**A**LICE CAREY kept looking at them, particularly at Allen, in that peculiar way. Allen raised his eyebrows.

"Well, Alice?" he said bluntly.

"Well what, sir?"

"What's on your mind?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Oh, yes, there is." He lit a cigarette. "Out with it."

The woman bit her lip.

"Come on!"

"Well, I—I couldn't help hearing you say you were going to stay here permanently," Alice faltered. "But maybe you won't sir. Not after last night. Maybe *she* won't let you."

"After last night?" repeated Allen. "Who do you mean won't let me?"

"The witch, sir. You ought to have—you ought not to have stopped the men last night."

Allen frowned in swift anger, then shrugged. Hell, he couldn't go around combating the combined superstition of the state of Georgia.

"I guess your witch won't bother us much. By the way, does there happen to be a picture of Sarah Fling in the house? A picture showing her as a girl?"

Alice nodded reluctantly.



"Let's have a look at it."

He and Laura bent over the enlarged old photograph of Sarah Fling taken thirty-two years before.

The picture showed a girl with dark, lustrous hair and brilliant dark eyes; a beautiful girl, with a strange, wild air about her that made you look twice—and then again.

"Hmm. I can see where any young man could fall for her," Allen observed. "She's certainly attractive."

"Attractive," said Laura slowly. "But—repulsive, too."

"Repulsive?"

"Look at her teeth. How white and—sharp—they are. Look at her eyes. They're almost like the eyes of an animal instead of a human being—though I can't tell you why I get the impression. Look at her hands, crossed in her lap. Did you ever see such long, sharp-pointed nails?"

Allen laughed. "You're going to find evidences of the witch in her even at that tender age, aren't you? I think she is most seductive. . . ."

He was to remember that remark some time later!

The morning passed in exploration and planning, and they had lunch. After lunch, with the monotony of the cold rain outside, and with the warm food, they got sleepy. They were in the library, a big room overlooking a pleasant formal garden. Allen sat in a big leather chair, and Laura sat on a low divan, with her feet tucked under her.

"I'm drowsy as the dickens," said Allen stretching.

"Take a nap, then," retorted Laura, patting a yawn.

"In the daytime? It seems a stupid thing to do."

"I'm going to," shrugged Laura. "I'm sleepy, too."

She stretched herself out on the divan, and Allen closed his eyes. . . .

AFTERWARD, he tried to recall the progress of his nap, from the time when he closed his eyes. But he couldn't. He only knew that he fell into a profound sleep, and then the visitation came. While it lasted, it seemed far too real for a dream; but before it began he had closed his eyes in sleep, and after it was over he opened his eyes from that same slumber. So he knew it *must* have been a dream.

Though, of course, he would have known that in any event. . . .

He was sitting in the big chair, head back. Then he sat straight with a jerk. The library door was slowly opening. He saw a tapering white hand, then a bare arm. The door opened widely, and the owner of hand and arm came in.

Allen gasped. She was a girl, young, beautiful as few girls are beautiful. She had long, lustrous dark hair and deep dark eyes, that flamed straight into his. And over her lovely body was not one thing save her long hair, which was a mantle revealing more than concealing since it waved silkily with every lithe step she took toward him.

A beautiful girl, with a strange, wild air about her. . . .

It was Sarah Fling of thirty-two years ago! The girl in the photograph—or her modern twin!

The beauty of the advancing, nude figure was erased from his mind. He cowered in the chair, seeing only the flame in the dark eyes, and the way the tapered hands were extended toward him like lovely claws. And he wanted to leap to his feet and run, but he could not move.

The dark beauty seemed to smile a little at his efforts, at the cold sweat that stood out on his forehead. The smile half revealed small, white, sharp teeth. She bent over him, with the cascading

hair parting from before the perfection of her breasts.

"Henry, my love," he heard her whisper. Her voice was melodious—and deadly.

He barely heard the words. He was too deeply in chaos from the nearness of her enticing beauty. His senses were whirling. He was terrified as he had never been before—and that terror did not chill in the least the mad desire he felt spring up within him to crush this naked, perfect body close to his.

His arms went slowly up. His hands touched the satiny shoulders of the girl leaning over him.

And in his ears rang the words he had heard last night.

"She takes on her girlhood handsomeness. The witch was a handsome wench, thirty-odd years ago. She shucks off her age and becomes like she was then."

But it was impossible, Allen's consciousness screamed. This glorious, deathly figure the aged, shrivelled, hideous hag he had carried to the hovel last night? Impossible!

And saying that, he knew it was not impossible—that the girl and the hag were one!

But knowing it, he still could not keep his maddened hands from sliding down the beautiful bare arms of the girl. Her red lips parted a little, came nearer.

"She sends the souls of the Camp men to hell! She does it with a kiss, tempting them to love her. After that, she kills their bodies like she killed their souls."

The red lips quivered. They were like an exquisite poisonous flower.

"Kiss me, Henry."

Henry! The name of his uncle, many years dead, who had abandoned her!

WITH an effort of will that left him trembling, Allen brought his hands down from that satiny loveliness. He

turned his face away, so that he should not see the luscious red lips.

"Kiss me."

Only one thing could have steeled him against that call. The one thing was—death. This was death, he knew, the dread kiss that was offered. Death to his soul—then death for his body.

He felt soft fingers under his chin, turning his face back so that he was forced to stare at the red, parted lips and then into the deep dark eyes.

"You will. . . ."

He gazed beyond the white figure, for help. Gazed at the form of Laura, his wife, stretched on the divan, with her breasts rising and falling in deep, peaceful sleep.

"Ahh. . . ." It was a snarl. The dark beauty's sharp white teeth showed. "It is because of her that you will not kiss me. You shall see. . . ."

So quickly that he could not stretch up a hand to detain her, she was gone, leaping to the side of the sleeping woman. Her hand flashed out. Allen yelled hoarsely. In her fingers he caught a glint of metal.

Then he heard Laura moaning, found himself on his feet—and only he and his wife in the room.

"Darling!"

He ran to her. She was moaning a little, bewilderedly, her eyes still dazed with sleep. And on the whiteness of her throat was a bleeding small design.

It was shaped like a tiny hoof.

"Allen, what happened? What hurt me? Did you. . . .?"

"Laura! Of course not."

"Then what hurt me? I was sound asleep. Then I felt pain at my throat and thought I heard some one running from the room almost soundlessly. . . .If you didn't do this—" her hand came from her throat with the fingers red—"who did?"

"I . . . don't know," muttered Allen.  
"I was asleep too."

"But *somebody* must—"

A scream from the door interrupted her, cutting across her words like a razor blade. Alice, the maid, stood there, with her blowzy yellow hair straying around her plain face. She screamed again, and shrank back as Laura took a step toward her. Her eyes were riveted on the little pattern pricked in her soft throat.

"The hoof!" she panted. "The devil's hoof—devil's brand—Oh!"

She ran from the doorway, and they could hear her race out the back door and into the rain.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Devil's Brand

THEY talked it over a lot during the evening and next day. It was easy to explain—that dream of Allen's. He had fallen into his nap with Sarah Fling intensely in his mind, with the girlhood picture of her etched in his brain. It was very natural that he should have dreamed the girl, Sarah Fling, came to his side. . . .

"But that," said Laura, when Allen had gone over it for the hundredth time, "doesn't explain it *all*."

And her fingers went to her throat, where the queer small wound was beginning to heal. The wound that looked oddly like a hoof.

There was a tangible thing, that had apparently happened in the dream!

"You scratched yourself," Allen kept saying. "When you woke, your hands went to your throat. It's a favorite gesture of yours when you're agitated. You scratched yourself without realizing it."

"Scratched myself in. . . just that way? So that the scratches look like the design of a hoof?"

"It isn't impossible," shrugged Allen.

At dinner next evening, he turned to Laura.

"Our family treated Sarah Fling rather badly, after all. Let's go to her hut, and try to help her. Money, if she'll take it. A better place to live, in the village. . . ."

Laura looked at him steadily.

"Is your only reason for going the desire to make up for the way Henry Camp treated her?"

"Of course," said Allen. But he lied.

Allen Camp, after that dream, after the strange marking that had terrified the maid out of her wits, was a little bit afraid. Not much. But a little. . . .

Naturally he still scoffed at the idea of any old woman being able to invoke supernatural powers; would always scoff at such absurdities. But there were other possibilities. If she were able to hypnotize from a distance, for example. . . .

Allen meant to bribe her into good will, though he would not admit that even to himself.

So they went toward the woods in which her hovel was located, at dusk.

They left dusk and plunged into eerie night when they entered the woods, on a narrow path.

They got to the hovel. Allen played his flashlight on the door. It was tightly closed, but under it he saw a strip of light. He knocked. There was no answer. After a second tap, believing the old woman was away, and deciding to go in and leave a note, he opened the door.

Sarah Fling was not away. She was there, in the hut. She lay on the rude pallet on the floor. At first they thought she was dead. They sprang toward her.

But she wasn't dead. She was in, what seemed at first, a profound sleep. But after a moment they saw that the unconsciousness that held the hag was deeper than any normal sleep.

SHE lay truly like a dead person, on her back, with her withered breast stirring to breathing twice as slow as normal. Allen gingerly lifted one of her eyelids. For an instant the rheumy orb beneath stared at them sightlessly. Then it was veiled by the lid when Allen released it.

"Is she ill—dying?" Laura whispered.

Allen shook his head, frowning. He had seen people like this before.

"She's in a trance. Self induced. I suppose she goes into them in the belief that she really can set her spirit free, to wander abroad and do mischief. Apparently she is sincere, though misguided, in her witch-work."

Laura shuddered a little. Allen looked around.

"What a hole!"

He stepped to a pile of herbs and sniffed them. The acrid odor told him nothing, he was ignorant of plant species. There was a cupboard near the rough little fireplace, where embers smouldered slowly and heated the hut. He went to that, opened it.

An exclamation ripped up his throat—but with the greatest effort of will of his life, he kept it from becoming audible. He willed his hand to shut that cupboard quickly, and his body to move so that Laura couldn't see into it. But so great was the shock of what he had seen in there—was looking at now with dazed eyes—that for a moment he couldn't move.

Bones in there. Many bones, some large, some small. A little skull on top of the pile, grinning out at him as though imbued with a ghastly, skeletal life.

The bones of a child!

Laura's scream whirled him around. She had seen. He slammed the cupboard shut.

"My God—Allen—"

He strode to the figure of the crone, lying in the death-like trance, and stood

over her with his face working and his fists clenched. He was close to becoming a murderer in that moment. He had kept her from being killed last night. God, what a mistake!

A fiend who killed children—used their remains in her hellish rites, which, to her cracked brain, seemed veritable witchcraft! She deserved to die. . . .

"A murderess," Laura whispered fearfully, staring down at the ghastly face.

But now reaction was setting in in Allen's mind. He relaxed his clenched fingers, and sweat poured down his face as he realized how close he had been to kicking the hag's head in.

"We don't know that," he said slowly. "She has a human skeleton in her hut. The skeleton of a child. But the bones are not fresh. She may have got them from some little grave in the woods, or from the Inchville Cemetery."

"Murderess!" repeated Laura, with conviction. "What ought we to do, Allen? Go to the sheriff?"

Allen gnawed at his lip. "Not yet. We can always do that. I think, first, we had better find out if any child has been missing, in the last few years. She's old and frail. A cell might kill her. We'd better investigate first—"

"Why would she get bones from a graveyard?"

"She's insane, darling," Allen said. "This proves it. She really believes, herself, that she is a witch. And she got the skeleton to help her in her crazy doings."

"I wonder if she *is* insane?" said Laura. They left the hovel.

"WE'LL start investigations in the morning," said Allen grimly. "If there is even a slight suspicion that she is—actively responsible for that little skeleton, she'll go to trial for murder."

But there were to be no investigations started the next day. Morning was only a

few hours off by the clock; in actual living it was to be half a lifetime away for Laura and Allen Camp.

They got to bed at one in the morning, after an evening of bleak silence.

Allen kissed Laura goodnight. They got in their twin beds, on opposite sides of the room.

And Allen went to sleep without any delay at all. He knew nothing—till a slight sound made him sit bolt upright in bed.

The sound came from Laura's side of the room. The moon shone in, but it did not penetrate to her side. He could see the floor up to within a foot of her bed, then only a vague white oblong which was the bed itself.

But after a moment in which he heard the sound again, and recognized it as stirring bed-clothes, he saw Laura. She had got up and was coming toward him, bathed by the moon as she stepped from shadow into its pool of light.

He gasped a little. She was nude; had evidently slipped out of her night-dress before leaving the bed. That was strange, unlike Laura. The moon glinted softly on skin as sleek as white silk, and touched the curves of hip and breast with a soft pale caress. And then he saw her eyes, wide open and staring at him.

Laura's eyes were blue. Light blue, to go with her blonde hair. But now—why, now her eyes seemed to be black!

And now he noticed that her hair seemed far darker than it really was. Dark brown. Almost black, too!

The nude figure got near to him, and Allen found himself gripped in a sort of paralysis. For suddenly the breath was clogging in his throat, and the blood congealing in his body with a strange and mystic horror.

The face of this woman who now bent over him with long hair parting to reveal the perfection of her breasts, was the face

of his wife. But those eyes, that hair—they were not the eyes and hair of Laura! They *were* dark, almost black!

With wild, eerie seduction the woman's red lips parted a little. And where had he seen them do that before? Her face came down toward his with a sinuous motion of her smooth white throat. And he had seen *that* gesture before.

"Henry, my love. . . ."

The words could hardly be heard. Yet he did hear them. And he began to tremble.

It was the dark beauty the world had known as Sarah Fling. Her words, her eyes, her weird, deathly passion! Yet the face was Laura's! In some impossible, horrible way, the two personalities were fusing. Sarah Fling was Laura, and Laura, somehow dwelt in Sarah Fling!

**I**T was a hideous nightmare fantasy which Allen couldn't begin to decipher. But he did know one thing.

It would be as deadly for him to touch those red lips now as it would have been yesterday, when they were not framed by his wife's face!

"Henry—kiss me. . . ."

The dying words scarcely sounded in the bedroom. But he heard. He would have heard them, he thought, if he had been half dead.

"Henry. . . ."

The name of his uncle, dead thirty years, pronounced by lips that had not been like this for thirty-two!

The face was very near to his. The lips were within inches of his. He was going to obey the deadly invitation. He knew it—could not fight against it.

His hand lashed up. It had moved desperately, more of its own accord than because of his will. Dazedly he saw it smash upward and into the lovely countenance—the face of Laura, his wife. Dazedly he

heard a gasp, and then a moaning cry; saw red drops ooze . . . .

The naked figure staggered back from him and sagged slowly to the floor.

"My God!"

He sprang up and lit the light. For a moment he could not bring himself to look at the nude beauty on the floor.

But then he stared, and he saw—blue eyes in which tears of pain and bewilderment formed. This was his wife. This was Laura, all Laura, with no hint of that wild dark beauty of the girl in the photograph.

Laura! And he had struck her!

"God, darling!"

He bent, helped her up, held her close. The bruise on her cheek was hideous.

"I must have been dreaming. Though I thought. . . . Never mind what I thought. I'm so sorry! So horribly sorry. . . ."

Laura stopped her sobbing. She stared at Allen.

"The witch! She had something to do with this. I had a dream too. I dreamed some voice, inside me, told me to get up and go over to you—like this—" She stared down at her nude loveliness. "Then—then I didn't know anything more till I felt you strike me—"

"And I wish I could cut my hand off for it," Allen said bitterly. "I—Listen!"

From out in the grounds somewhere, came a high, eerie cry. Almost like the cry of a night-bird, it was, save that there was in it a human note. Human? Well, not—quite—human. . . .

"I believe that's her!" muttered Allen tensely. "Sarah Fling—"

He raced out the bedroom door, barefooted, in pajamas. Down the stairs he sped, and out doors.

He could see nothing in the moonlight. Nothing. Bushes and trees cast deep shadows, but not so deep that he couldn't have

seen a form lurking there had there been one to see. He sped to the front of the grounds. . . .

And then, from the big house behind him, came a wild, shrill cry. It was a shriek that seemed to stop his heart for a moment. After that he was running blindly, with all his speed, toward the house. For the shriek was Laura's, and had come from the room in which he had just left her.

Faster than ever he had sped down the stairs, he raced up them.

"God, let everything be all right," he was mumbling, as he wrenched the bedroom door open.

But Laura was gone . . . .

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Captive of the Damned

**H**E must have gone mad for a little while. Anyway, he could never afterward remember what had happened during the ensuing few moments. At one minute he was raving like a maniac in the ominously empty bedroom; at the next he was staring at something that beckoned to him from a bush on the west side of the house. Beckoned like a pale, wraithlike hand in the moonlight.

He ran toward it. The thing was a wisp of blue negligée. Laura's negligée. It had been hanging over the back of a chair near her bed, he remembered. Evidently she had caught it up and thrown it over her nakedness after he left her.

Now, it was here. On the thorny twig-end of this bush. So she had gone this way, after that frightful shriek.

The bush was at the side of a trail leading across an old orchard and into the woods. He raced down the trail.

"Laura! Laura. . . ."

Another wisp of pale blue, looking white in the dimness, caught his eye along

the path. He sped on. And now he no longer shouted. A shred of sanity was coming back to his chaotic brain.

Laura would not have screamed had not some grisly thing horrified her. And she would certainly not have run, of her own volition, from the comparative safety of the house into the black, sinister forest. Therefore, almost certainly the thing that had scared her was taking her down this path now!

And ahead of him, far ahead, he heard a sort of bubbling cry, as though a scream had been cut off by brutal hands clamped around a corded white throat just in time.

Ahead, there was a low hill. The path went to this hill and seemed to end. Then he saw that it went on over the knoll.

But to the right of the path, the mound was cut sharply off in a low cliff. And a spot of this cliff was rosy red.

The mouth of a little cave, he saw, with light of some sort—probably firelight—

streaming out of it. He crept forward and looked in . . . .

The scene within was so impossible, so utterly fantastic, that for an instant it shocked all emotion from him.

The cave was perhaps fifteen feet in diameter, roughly round. In its center lay Laura, with the blue negligée, or what was left of it, stripped from her perfect shoulders and thrown across her waist. Beyond her was another woman, standing tall and straight, staring down at Laura. Allen had seen enough of this other to know her—she was Sarah Fling, as the photograph showed her years ago.

On those red lips was an awful smile, and it was called forth by still a third person in the cave. This was, Allen thought, a man—though the figure was so cloaked in black that he could not be sure. Over his face was a hood, which allowed only glittering eyes to show.

(Continued on page 119)

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**C**LAY heard the thing in the studio dragging about in its blind, sluggish way. . . . Vivian was in there. The white light beat almost squarely on her. She was near the clay figure which had grown like a leprous excrescence through all these nights. She was nude. Her slender, tall body was forced back over a wood block, to which it was also bound—forced back like a bent bow, until it was a wonder her spine did not snap. Her arms and legs were corded with wildly struggling muscles ridging under the satin skin as she fought against the bonds. There was a gag over her lips. Through the gag filtered faint, awful sounds as her screams were clogged back in her distended throat.

And always Vivian's eyes, wide and glaring, were directed on the *thing* which at the moment was bent in hideous concentration over the growing clay figure as if in ghastly affection. The white light clung to rotting garments on a tall, emaciated form. It silvered the face—if such a visage could be called a face—illuminating the trace of what had been a nose, the remnants of pendulous lips, and the rotted, jagged teeth which yet remained behind them. . . . And the hands of the *thing*, patting and sliding over the features of the clay face, were hardly more than flaps, with rotted, broken, and uneven stumps in place of what had been fingers.

And now those hands left the clay figure, began groping blindly toward the nude, helplessly struggling form of the girl—the living, breathing girl who was serving Death as a model for Agony. . . .

How Clay and Vivian Cameron fell beneath the power of an unspeakable being who apparently returned from the grave to create his most spectacular works of art, is told in Paul Ernst's story appearing in next month's **DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE**: "The Monster Who Worked in Clay."



## Satan Sends His Mistress

(Continued from page 117)

In the hand of the black-robed figure was a steel rod. The other end of the rod was in the small fire beside Laura, which threw its beams out the cave mouth. The rod was withdrawn and the glowing, red hot tip came into Allen's view.

It was not just a plain rod-end; it was a curious sort of uneven circle, like a brand. And then he saw just what it was: A brand in the shape of a cloven hoof!

A laugh, low, melodious, indescribably evil, came from Sarah Fling's lips.

"The devil's brand! The devil's hoof! Mark it deep in the white flesh of her body. Then shall we kill her, and let another of the men of the Camp clan know the wrong done me by one of their number."

**I**N a coma of horror, Allen saw the red-hot brand move toward Laura. Past her face it went, to hover over the white satin of her abdomen, just above where the negligée veiled her beauty.


And then Allen's paralysis snapped. With a hoarse yell, he leaped into the little cavern. And the glowing brand stopped its advance toward Laura's white flesh while its wielder turned to stare at Allen. And over the crouching figure's shoulder, the deadly, dark, basilisk eyes of rejuvenated Sarah Fling stared too.

The crouching figure cried out, and leaped to its feet. It sprang toward Allen, with the fires of hell in its eyes, and with the red hot iron raised for a slashing blow. Allen fell on one knee, and the swishing rod made an arc over his head. He caught the robed figure around the waist.

He saw, out of the corner of his eye, the red-hot iron fall from the hooded figure's hands as that figure crashed to the rock floor. Then he was fighting to keep the robed man down, while, with wild strength, his opponent struggled.

(Continued on page 120)

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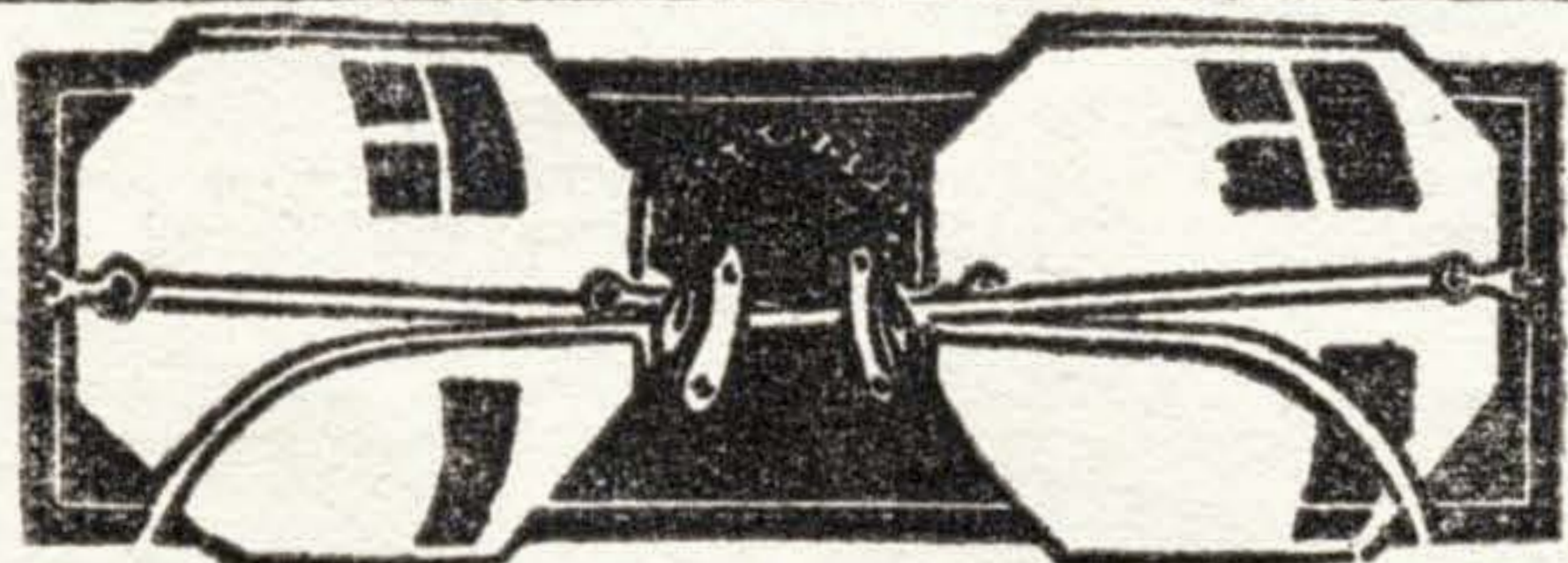
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(Continued from page 119)

He smashed his fist into the covered face, heard a gasp of pain that was wholly human. He struck again, felt his knuckles glance off flesh. The leaping firelight made the two look, in shadow, like giants fighting to the death. Then, to their shadows on the rock wall, a third was added.

Like a panther, she came. Allen saw her spring toward them, saw her hand rise. He tried to move away, but he ducked too late. Her hand fell, and something smashed with terrible force on his head. . . .

Leaping, rosy light against his eyelids. A moan from near at hand. These small sights and sounds slowly impinged on his unconsciousness till his senses began to return. Finally he groaned a little himself, and sat up. Then, with a wild cry, he got unsteadily to his feet. . . .

On the floor lay Laura, just beginning to move, moaning a little as her eyelids fluttered. But she and Allen were the only ones in the cavern.

Allen pressed his hands against his aching eyeballs till the world steadied itself. Then he stooped and picked up Laura.

"Allen," she whispered. "Oh—Allen! It carried me here—a great black thing . . . Take me back to the house."

Allen turned toward the path. But when he got there, he went on up the mound instead of toward Camp Acres.

"Why, darling—"

"Ssh," said Allen. "There's a place we have to go—something we have to do—before we go back to the house."

His voice was thick, almost like that of a drunken man. Blood from a cut over his right temple trickled constantly down his cheek. Laura's eyes widened as she stared at his white face.

It was the face of one who is not quite sane.

"That hag's hut is near here. Less than a hundred yards away. We're going to—visit the witch. . . . first."

## Satan Sends His Mistress

L AURA shrank in his arms as she stared into his bloodshot eyes. He strode on with her, like a machine.

"Allen—"

"A red-hot brand," he said thickly. "Red hot metal. They would have seared you with it. Seared your white body. And then would have killed you. Because you were a Camp woman."

"You're not going to—kill her—Allen?"

"She deserves to die. The hag! The witch! Why did the devil send me to that lynching in time to save her? But I'll make up for that . . ."

"For God's sake, Allen! Not that! You can't murder her. . . ."

Laura's shrill voice died away. It was plain that he was not listening, had heard no single word. The hovel of Sarah Fling showed as a dim black mound in the black dimness of the woods, ahead of them. A narrow strip of light still shone under the crooked door.

"Stay out here," Allen said, setting Laura down beside the door.

"Allen—I won't let you do this . . ."

"Stay out of here!"

There was a length of wood at their feet. Allen bent stiffly and picked it up. He swung it like a club.

"Allen!"

"Red-hot iron about to sear your body," he said, monotonously. "After that, they would have killed you. Then me. This way, the witch won't have a chance to do her work of murder any more."

He brushed her clutching hand away, and opened the door of the hut.

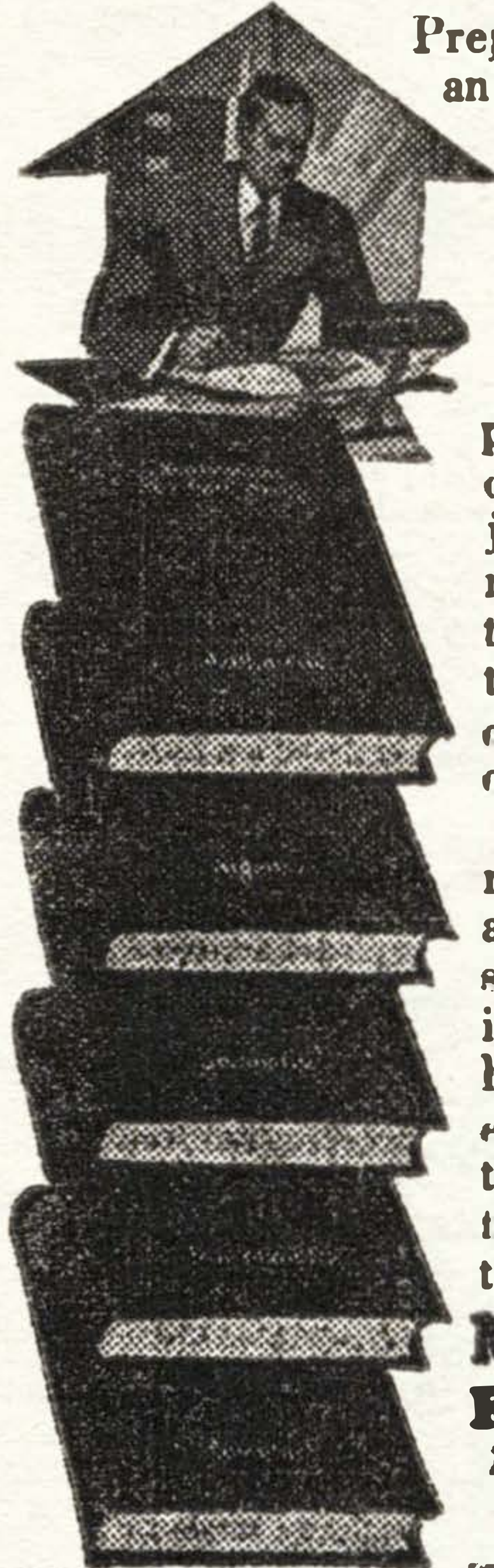
Still in her trance, aged Sarah Fling was: the aged body a slow-breathing shell from which the spirit had wandered.

Into animals, that dread spirit was said to have forced its way before now. But

(Continued on page 122)

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(Continued from page 121)

it was into no animal that the witch had forced her soul since Allen Camp had brought his bride here. She had pre-empted the body of another woman—a young, beautiful woman. Whose?

No matter. This hag had killed.

Allen stood straight and tense above her. He could hear Laura hammering at the door, calling out frantically to him. He paid no attention. The club raised.

But as he stood that way, he paused, while something caught his eye beyond the near-dead body of the witch. There was a broken-backed dresser over there. One of the drawers was not quite closed. From it came several fine strands of stuff. Silk thread? Light yellow thread? It looked like it. And yet it didn't, quite.

A little of the madness left Allen's eyes as the unaccountable familiarity of the strands struck home to him. At the same time, he heard Laura suddenly cease beating on the door, and heard no further sound from her. Not one. There was a sort of scuffle out there in the dark for just an instant, and that was all.

Allen leaped to the bureau. The silky yellow stuff was hair. A wig.

He went back to the crone in her trance. His left hand touched his cut temple' as he moved. He raised the club over the hag's head.

"There!" he grated, bringing it down with a sickening thud. "You'll kill no more."

HE STOOD there with bloody club. "God! I've killed her . . . ."

The door crashed. Its flimsy bolt shattered. It opened to admit two figures, dragging a third. One of the figures was the dark beauty of the photograph. The second was a man, with a dark robe over his body but with his face unmasked. He had his right arm around Laura's waist and was dragging her. He loosed her,

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## Satan Sends His Mistress

now. She sank to the floor and covered her face with her hands.

Allen stared dully at the two. They were looking at the bloody club, and at the still body of old Sarah Fling. And there was no horror in their eyes: there was demoniac satisfaction.

The woman, Allen could see now, was the one who had masqueraded as Alice Carey, making herself look older and heavier, wearing blonde hair over her dark tresses. The man was—Robert Parker.

"He did it," said the woman. "He killed her! I told you he would, Robert."

Allen dropped the club as though it had stung him, but kept his eyes on their faces. The woman's dark eyes glittered.

"So you're a murderer. Mr. Allen Camp! You know where murderers go, don't you? To the chair! And Robert Parker and I are practically witnesses."

An evil smile shaped her lips.

"You'll pay us plenty to keep our mouths shut!"

Allen wet his lips.

"I . . . I begin to see," he mumbled. "Blackmail, eh? You planned to have me do just this!" He stared with a shudder at the hag's body.

"You, Alice Carey—"

"The name," said the woman, smirking, "Is Alicia Chase. From New York, not Inchville."

"You, Alicia Chase, with drugs and hypnotism, manipulated Mrs. Camp and me. Is that right?"

"Why, I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing!" purred the woman.

"You planted the bones in Sarah Fling's cupboard." Allen said slowly. "And awhile ago, I suppose you left shreds of the blue negligée on the bushes purposely, so I'd have an easy trail to follow. I was supposed to see the scene in the cave, wasn't I? And he driven crazy by it?"

(Continued on page 124)



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(Continued from page 123)

"I don't know what you're talking about," shrugged the man, touching a bruise on his jaw.

"The photograph of Sarah Fling in her youth," Allen went on bitterly. "I suppose it was simply a picture of you, Alicia Chase, treated to look antique. Any dark girl could pass as Sarah Fling in her girlhood . . . . You two must have planned this some time ago, as soon as you, Parker, knew I was coming here to live. Planned it on the basis of the old woman's known hatred for the Camps, and her bad name as a witch. It must have given you a bad moment when she was nearly lynched."

The woman stirred impatiently.

"This isn't getting you anywhere, Allen Camp. The only thing that matters is that you'll pay us fifty thousand dollars, tonight, for keeping our mouths shut about the murder—and more later when we ask for it—"

Robert Parker's sudden exclamation cut across her words.

"Alicia! The old hag's head! Look!"

"What's wrong with it?"

"That's just it. Nothing! Camp is supposed to have smashed her head in with a club—and it isn't even bloody!"

With a gasp, the woman jumped to the crone's side. She looked with incredulous eyes at the old woman's head—and then whirled to stare at Allen.

Allen was smiling a little now. The smile was more flinty than any curse.

"Parker's quite right," he said evenly. "Her head isn't bloody. It's untouched."

"Why, you—But your club—" panted the woman—"There's blood on it—"

"My own blood. I smeared it from the cut on my temple just a moment before I hit the earth floor beside Sarah Fling's head and called out that I'd killed her."

**T**HE woman's face was dreadful. Parker was swearing softly. Laura stared up with wild hope in her eyes.

## Satan Sends His Mistress

Allen produced the wig.

"You shouldn't have left this here after you drugged Sarah Fling into her 'trance'," he said to Alicia Chase. "It gave your show away—thank God. As soon as I saw this bleached, dead looking yellow hair, I knew where I'd seen it before. On the head of 'Alice Carey'. I couldn't figure it. But one thing was plain. The person behind the things happening to Mrs. Camp and me was the one working in our house—not Sarah Fling. Why, then, frame the old woman as you were doing? It could only be to make me hate her. To make me kill her, perhaps, as I had come here to do? I didn't know, but I went ahead with the act on the chance, to try to discover what it was all about. Now you've practically confessed. Thank you. I'll take you to the sheriff's office now."

Laura cried out suddenly. But Allen had seen what she had—the tightening of Parker's muscles for a spring to the door. Allen got there first, and then backed away a step.

A snarling hiss had sounded there. It came from a great black cat that stood in the doorway with its back arched and its yellow eyes staring at Alicia Chase.

Allen started to turn back to Parker. After all, only a cat....

But the woman's shrill scream rang out.

"My God—it's her! The witch!"

She backed away from the furred black thing. As she moved, so did the cat, stalking soundlessly on padded paws.

"It's old Sarah!" shrilled the dark woman. "God . . . I planned her death . . . I doped her . . . Now she—"

The cat sprang with a wild screech that tore the nerves like a great file.

No man could have moved fast enough to prevent what happened next. Allen tried. But a full second before he reached the woman he saw the cat, a clawing, de-

(Continued on page 127)

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

Present Position .....

Address .....

**Kidneys  
must clean  
acids from  
your blood**



**DR. W. R. GEORGE**  
Former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis

# Your System is Poisoned

**And May Cause Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, and a Run-Down Condition When Kidneys Function Poorly**

Your health, vitality and energy are extremely dependent upon the proper functioning of your kidneys. This is easy to understand when you learn that each kidney, although only the size of your clenched fist, contains 4½ million, tiny, delicate tubes or filters. Your blood circulates through these tiny filters 200 times an hour, night and day. Nature provides this method of removing acids, poisons, and toxins from your blood.

## Causes Many Ills

Dr. Walter R. George, many years Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, recently stated: "Most people do not realize this, but the kidneys probably are the most remarkable organs in the entire human anatomy. Their work is just as important and just as vital to good health as the work of the heart. As Health Commissioner of the City of Indianapolis for many years and as medical director for a large insurance company, I have had opportunity to observe that a surprisingly high percentage of people are devitalized, rundown, nervous, tired, and worn-out because of poorly functioning kidneys."

If your kidneys slow down and do not function properly and fail to remove approximately 3 pints of Acids, Poisons, and liquids from your blood every 24 hours, then there is a gradual accumulation of these Acids and Wastes, and slowly, but surely, your system becomes poisoned, making you feel old before your time, rundown and worn out.

Many other troublesome and painful symptoms may be caused by poorly functioning kidneys, such as Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Frequent Headaches and Colds, Rheumatic Pains, Swollen Joints, Circles Under Eyes, Backaches, Loss of Vitality, Burning, Itching, Smarting and Acidity.

## Help Kidneys Doctors' Way

Druggists and doctors in over thirty-five countries throughout the world think that the proper way to help kidney functions is with the modern, up-to-date Doctor's prescription, Cystex, because it is scientifically prepared in strict accordance with the United States and British Pharmacopoeia to act directly on the

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And Dr. T. A. Ellis, of Toronto, Canada, has stated: "Cystex' influence in aiding the treatment of sluggish kidney and bladder functions can not be over-estimated." And Dr. C. Z. Rendelle, of San Francisco, said: "I can truthfully recommend the use of Cystex," while Dr. N. G. Giannini, widely known Italian physician, stated: "I have found men and women of middle age particularly grateful for the benefits received from such medication. A feeling of many years lifted off one's age often follows the fine effects of Cystex."

## Guaranteed 8-Day Test

If you suffer from any of the conditions mentioned in this article or feel rundown, worn out, and old before your time, poorly functioning kidneys may be the real cause of your trouble. And because Cystex has given successful results in thousands of cases throughout the world after other things had failed, you should put this doctor's prescription to the test immediately, with the understanding that it must prove satisfactory in every way within 8 days, or you merely return the empty package and the full purchase price is refunded.

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## Satan Sends His Mistress

(Continued from page 125)

moniac ball of fury, get to her face with razorlike talons.

Shriek after shriek tore from the woman's lips. They kept on coming after Allen had knocked the great cat down and it had streaked out of the hovel.

"My eyes! I can't see! I'm blind—"

Screaming, sobbing, she crouched on the floor, with her hands over her gouged, bloody face. Parker, whimpering like a horrified child, shrank against the wall.

There was a stir from that body which had been inert for so long. Sarah Fling moved on her pallet. Her lips twisted as though she were being tortured, as she writhed there. From them came a cry. No, not a cry, so much as a long-drawn-out *screech!* Like a cat's screech!

She opened her eyes and stared at the four in her hut. Then her eyes went to the shivering, sobbing woman with bloody hands over her blood-streaming face; and the rheumy orbs flamed luridly with the embers of rage and satisfaction.

"Look!" panted Laura, pointing. "Allen—look!"

"Witch! Witch!" whimpered Parker. "Oh, my God...."

Allen was staring in the direction of Laura's quivering finger. She was pointing at the crouching woman. More particularly at her fingernails.

The long, sharp fingernails of Sarah Fling were drenched with fresh blood!

THE END



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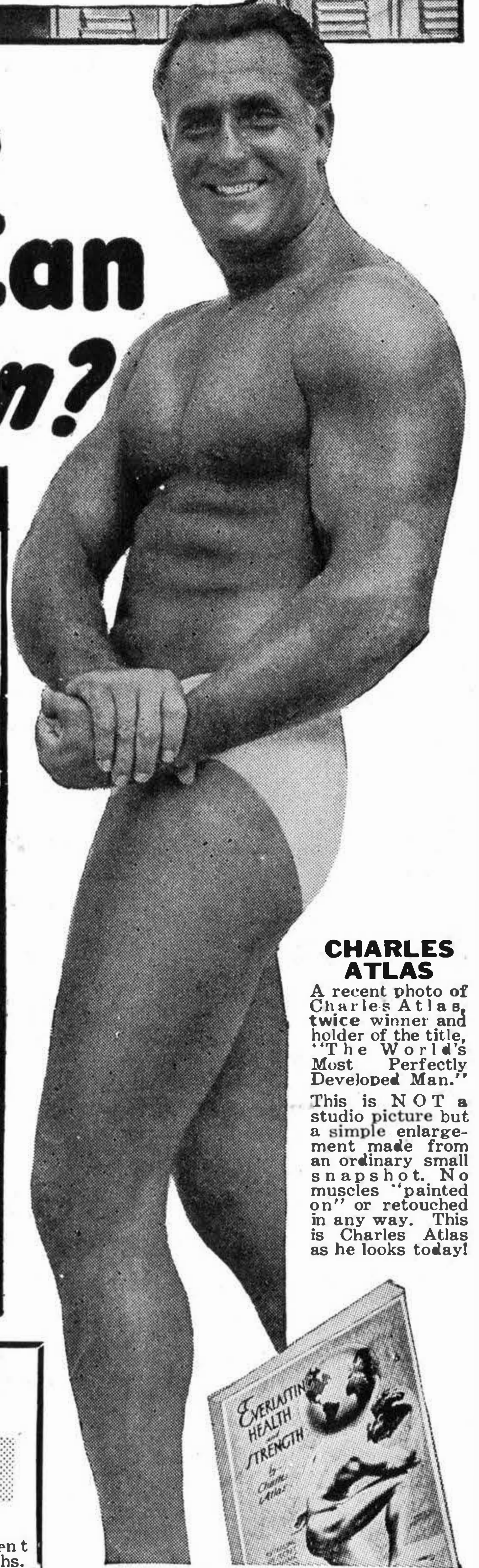
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