

JAN - FEB

# TERROR TALES

15¢



JAN - FEB  
TERROR TALES



## SCHOOL MISTRESS OF THE MAD

FEATURE-LENGTH  
MYSTERY-TERROR NOVEL

by  
**RUSSELL GRAY**

## PARADE OF THE TINY KILLERS

A BLOOD-CHILLING NOVELETTE

by  
**NAT SCHACHNER**

EDITH & EJLER JACOBSON  
RALSTON SHIELDS  
JOHN KOBLER

15¢

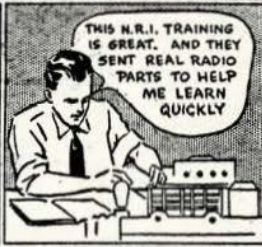




**YES-** I'M CONVINCED THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD MONEY IN RADIO. I'M GOING TO START TRAINING FOR RADIO RIGHT NOW.

**NO-** NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.

**BILL SAID "YES"**  
HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW



THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS GREAT. AND THEY SENT REAL RADIO PARTS TO HELP ME LEARN QUICKLY



YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.

I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME

THANKS



OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING

**TOM SAID "NO"**  
HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE -- LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM, UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE

# I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time* FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB



J. E. Smith, President National Radio Institute Established 1914

Many Radio Experts Make \$30 \$50, \$75 a Week Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.



## Many Make \$4, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job sheets: show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500+ for hundreds while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-60 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

**Find Out What Radio Offers You** Art Fobias. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 14 years old. It points out Radio's sure

time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, PRESIDENT NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE DEPT. 9A89 WASHINGTON, D. C.



IT'S NOT TOO LATE. TAKE MY TIP AND MAIL THAT COUPON TO N.R.I. TONIGHT

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9A89 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio" which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your method of training men at home to be Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME..... AGE.....  
 ADDRESS.....  
 CITY..... STATE.....

# TERROR TALES



VOLUME TEN      JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1939      NUMBER TWO

**THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!**

All stories in magazines bearing this seal are written especially for this publisher and have never before been printed in any form!

## A LONG NOVEL OF EERIE TERROR

- School Mistress of the Mad**.....Russell Gray    7  
 Lovely Linda Hudson disregarded young Blair's inspired warning, and took a job as teacher to a horde of inbred idiots. How could she know that she would be called upon to mother a new strain among that brood of slavering, bestial imbeciles!

## FOUR PULSE-STIRRING MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

- Death's Winged Squadron**.....Edith & Ejler Jacobson    42  
 A plague of blasting destruction spread terror and desolation over the doomed city. And just before each ghastly tragedy I thought I saw flash across the horizon the contorted face of one of my own playground youngsters!
- Dead Hands Seek My Bride**.....Dane Gregory    58  
 Ever since Sheila, in girlhood, was saved from the monstrous attack of Crazy Charlie, her obsession grew—her obsession that the madman, long dead, was reaching from the grave to take her. When lovely Connie's severed head was flung from the night into our cabin—Sheila knew her time had come. . . .
- A Kiss for the Blood Lady**.....Ralston Shields    72  
 Dr. Corvin saved my life—or did he? For he transferred my healthy brain into the body of a killer-maniac, a man who had spent his days spilling the blood he needed to appease the beautiful, sylph-like Prani. Now, I too craved Prani, and for her, I was willing to offer the blood of my wife!
- Parade of the Tiny Killers**.....Nat Schachner    90  
 Valentine Frazer was the town's laughing stock, then. But they didn't laugh a year later, when Valentine came back with an evil stone idol which seemed to come to terrible life—to crush the town's fairest girls to death in its basalt arms!

## TRUE FEATURE OF THE AGE OF HORROR

- Disciples of Death**.....John Kobler    33  
 Those who capitalized on sin and debauchery!

—AND—

- Let This Be Warning!**.....The Editor    4  
 Consider your fear with care. . . .
- Black Chapel**.....A Department    109

Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 2226 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary; Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter, May 27, 1936, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1938, by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 15c. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. \$ 3.50. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

# They're the Tops in Detective Fiction!

## DETECTIVE TALES

The ALL-STAR January Issue  
Is on sale right NOW!

The night that Geoffrey Lasiter, III, scion of a crumbled aristocracy, sat studying in his huge library, the last thing he expected to see was a dainty feminine hand unfastening his casement windows. But that is what he saw, and because he was as chivalrous as his buccaneering great-grandfather, he let that hand lead him through a trail of blood to save an old man from using half a million dollars to endow a *Murder Sanatorium!* A human, moving mystery novel by Edward S. Williams. . . . Paul Ernst tells us a vivid, thrilling story about a certain party who neatly lined up about \$20,000,000 of old Aunt Hepsiah's fabulous fortune—but *The Coffin Came Home!* . . . Fred MacIsaac scores again with that very human and very canny amateur investigator, Reggie Royce. This time Reggie fast-talks a gal into wearing Death's diamonds—so he can provide *A Corpse For Cinderella!*

The all-star program in the January issue also includes highlights and spotlights by such favorites as George A. McDonald, Ray Cummings, Wyatt Blassingame, Denslow M. Dade, R. W. Thompson, and others! . . .

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER returns with another smashing Paul Pry novelette—*It's the McCoy*. Pry, that suave fly in the ointment of the underworld and his one-armed camera-eye sidekick, Mugs Magoo, come as close to pushing up daisies in this thrilling yarn as they ever have. Watch Mugs play rajah to a harem of blond houris while Paul drums his way out of trouble and into the dough—and a gang of sadder but wiser crooks win nothing but weep stakes when they try to make off with a suitcase full of hot ice. And Johnny Dalmas, RAYMOND CHANDLER'S none-such of private dicks, solves the riddle of *The Lady in the Lake* in a complete, novel-length triple-homicide mystery. It all began when Violets M'Gee, homicide dick in the sheriff's office, foisted a cosmetic manufacturer with wife-trouble on Dalmas. At first it looked like just another one of those things, but the keyhole-peeping angle wasn't half of it. Too many corpses in the wrong places added up to headline proportions overnight and Dalmas was behind the eight-ball from the start, till he decided to engage in a little murder magic on his own hook. Then FREDERICK C. DAVIS brings back Keyhole Kerry, radio's ace crime reporter in another action-packed mystery. Plus *The Judas Touch* an Acme Insurance Dick Novelette by JAN DANA, and other stories and features.



The January issue will be on  
sale December 2nd!

10 DIME  
DETECTIVE  
MAGAZINE

**TRAIN FOR ELECTRICITY**  
 "Learn by Doing" **IN 12 WEEKS**  
**I'LL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING!**  
 My Big Free Book tells you how we train you in 12 weeks—to start in the growing field of Electricity, by actual shopwork on real electrical machinery—not by books or correspondence. Amusing ideas make money to get training first. . . . Then 12 to 12 Months to pay in small monthly payments starting 5 Months from date you start school. Experience or advanced education not needed. Many Earn While Learning. Free lifetime employment service. **Classical Engines, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning** instruction included. **MAIL COUPON** FREE BOOK and all Facts.

**G. LEWIS, President, COVNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**  
 900 S. Paulina St., Dept. 19-78, Chicago, Ill.  
 Send Big Free Book with facts on Covne training and tell me about your "Pay- tuition-After-Graduation" Plan.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Air Become An Conditioning Engineer**

Big fast-growing field for men trained in design, estimating, insulating, installing and servicing. Offers real opportunities in Air Conditioning new buildings and remodeling worth-while old buildings. Write today for method of how you can prepare for this thriving industry. No obligation.

American School, Dept. AC-149, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

**PHOTO RING**  
 A SENSATION! Send any snapshot or photograph and we'll reproduce it in this beautiful ox-like ring with new magnified setting! Enclose strip of paper for ring size. Pay postman plus a few cents postage. If you send cash we pay postage. **48c** (Hand Painted 25c extra)  
 Rex Photo Ring Co., Dept 2-P, Box 14, Cincinnati, O.

**FOLLOW THIS MAN**  
 Secret Service Operator No. 38 in on the job! Runners down dangerous Counterfeit Gang, Tall-tale finger prints in murdered girl's room.  
**Free** The Confidential Report Operator No. 38 made to his boss! Write for it.  
 Earn a Regular Monthly Salary  
 YOU can become a Finger Print Expert at home, in your spare time, at small cost. Write for confidential bill report and details. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.  
 INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE  
 Dept. 7301 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**If I Send YOU THIS FINE SUIT—**

Will You Wear it and Show it to Friends? I need a reliable man in your home. Have thousands made-to-measure, all-wool DEMONSTRATING SUIT—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to \$12.00 in a day. My line contains over 150 quality woolsens, all sensational values, guaranteed. You need no experience or money. I supply everything required, FREE of extra cost. Write me today for FREE details. **H. J. GRAVES, STONE-FIELD CORP., 1300 W. Harrison Street, Dept. N-799, Chicago, Illinois.**

Enjoy **BEAUTIFUL Natural-Looking FALSE TEETH**  
 LOWEST PRICES  
**SEND NO MONEY**

60 DAYS TRIAL satisfaction. Monthly payments possible. FREE mouth-forms, directions, catalog. **WRITE TODAY!** C. T. Johnson, Pres. **UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY**  
 Dept. 187 1558 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**LET THIS BE WARNING!**

**J**UST EXACTLY how important a part in our lives is played by the emotion *fear*? The answer, any psychologist will tell you, is a very great part indeed. The very structure of living is built upon fear: fear of hunger, of pain, of death . . . of subjection to invaders from foreign lands. Most of the great empires of the past have been built on fear, and we have recently had very good examples of the power of fear in European politics. . . .

At present, however, we are concerned with fear as concerns every-day people. Consider, for instance the hundreds of thousands of young housewives who spend most of their days at home—behind locked doors. Every salesman who comes to the door is a potential menace, perhaps a sex maniac; every tramp who asks for a handout might be a madman escaped from an institution for the violently insane. It is no wonder that innocent people are afraid even in their own homes. Why do you suppose thousands of doors in city apartment houses are equipped with a small peephole, through which one may look out, but not in? Wide-spread fear made the practice necessary. Housewives wanted to be able to apprise callers before admitting them. Too many horrible atrocities have occurred because women have thoughtlessly allowed strangers into their homes.

Have you ever watched a singing beggar come through a quiet street of city dwellings? If so, you have noticed two things: one, at intervals along the street, women toss a few coins onto the sidewalk below; two, the lady who throws the money usually ducks back into her window before she lets the beggar see her. She has an inner fear that the singer will embarrass her by coming to her door and asking for something to eat. And she would be afraid to let him in—unless her heart were bigger than her judgment.

Consider this case: Mrs. Beemis tossed coins to a singing beggar several days in succession. He must have figured her an easy mark, for on the fourth day he came straight to her door. She knew he was coming, and she was afraid. But she had a morbid desire to be frightened—an im-

**LET THIS BE WARNING!**

pulse she didn't understand, but to which she gave way. She let him in and fed him. She used to scrub the kitchen table and chair where he sat, because he was so loathsome.

Day after the day the man came, until finally Mrs. Beemis began to dread his regular arrival. She dared not tell her husband, because he had forbidden her to let strangers of any description into the house. Finally she found that she was waking at night, cringing from the image of the filthy singing beggar. And at last she decided to tell him she would no longer feed him.

The tramp acted contrite, said he would bother her no more. When he departed, he slyly put the door on the latch—or that is what the poor woman later thought. All she knew definitely was that she stepped into the bath tub shortly after he departed . . . Suddenly she heard the door open, looked up to see the grinning, leering face of the man she had befriended. She uttered a blood-curdling scream, and the singing beggar attacked her, the fire of madness burning in his evil, red-rimmed eyes.

Mrs. Beemis fought like a wildcat, but gradually she was succumbing to the monster's superhuman strength. Her head was pressed under water; her life's breath was squeezing from her lungs in one last burst. Then liquid blackness flowed over her. . .

George Beemis could not positively account for the feeling of unrest that made him go home that afternoon. All he knew was that some weird intuition made him do so; perhaps he had been dwelling subconsciously on his wife's nervous furtiveness which he had been noticing of late. But he did go home—and he was in time to beat an atrocious killer to insensibility. The attacker was identified as an escaped madman. Take heed—let this incident be a warning!

There is still another phase in our lives in which fear takes part: entertainment. Who of us does not thrill to a spine-tingling mystery film? And what about the exhilaration afforded by modern mystery-terror fiction? One can take his measure of tense excitement behind locked doors—in perfect safety!



**START  
\$1260 to \$2100 YEAR  
MANY 1939  
APPOINTMENTS EXPECTED**

**Railway Postal Clerks**

Railway Postal Clerks get \$1,900 the first year regular, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. (\$79.17 each pay day.) Their pay is automatically increased yearly to \$2,450. Advance may be had to Chief Clerk at \$3,700 a year. (\$112.50 each pay day.)



**Travel On  
"Uncle Sam's"  
Pay Roll**

**3 Days On — 3 Days Off — Full Pay**

Railway Postal Clerks on long runs usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty their pay continues full as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business. When they grow old they are retired with a pension.

**City Mail Carriers, Post Office Clerks**

Clerks and Carriers now get \$1,700 the first year on regular and automatically increase \$100 a year to \$2,100 and \$3,000.

**GOVERNMENT  
CLERK**

**File Clerk — Clerk**

Open to Men—Women 18 to 50. Entrance salary \$1,200—\$1,440 Year. Advancements as File Clerks and Clerks in the Departments at Washington, D. C., are made from this examination.

**Many Other Positions**

Many other positions are obtainable. Those wishing these positions should qualify or else



**Get Free List of Positions**

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now at once.

This investment may result in your getting a big-paid government job.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. E-174, Rochester, N. Y.

Rush to me, entirely free of charge (1) a full description of U. S. Government Jobs; (2) Free copy of Illustrated 32-page book, "U. S. Government Positions and How to Get Them"; (3) List of U. S. Government Jobs; (4) Tell me what I do to qualify for a U. S. Government Job.

Name.....

Address.....

Use This Coupon Before You Miss It. Write or Print Plainly.

# Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore spin a tale of finer whiskey!

"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
How can we retain our  
native modesty..."



"When folks holler from the  
tree-tops:  
'M & M is really THE tops  
For its mellow flavor  
and its quality!'"



"Yes, Mr. Moore,  
Yes, Mr. Moore,  
These ovations make me blush  
till I turn pink..."



"And the reason,—er—ahem—is  
That our whiskey, M & M, is  
Slow-distilled for glorious goodness,  
yet priced lower than you'd think!"



There are lots of reasons why  
YOU should start enjoying this  
fine, mellow, slow-distilled whis-  
key, at once!

One reason—M & M is ALL  
whiskey, every drop in every bot-  
tle! Another reason—it is a blend  
of straight whiskies... the kind of

whiskey we believe is tops!

There are more reasons—but  
have the pleasure of discovering  
them for yourself! Ask for M & M,  
at your favorite bar or package  
store, today. And, here's one more  
reason you should try M & M—the  
price is amazingly LOW!

## Mattingly & Moore

**Long on Quality—Short on Price!**

*A blend of straight whiskies—100% straight whiskies—90 proof.  
Frankfort Distilleries, Incorporated, Louisville and Baltimore.*





# School Mistress of the Mad

*Chet Blair implored lovely Linda Hudson to refuse that teaching position. But Linda wouldn't listen—until the madness of the idiots in Gring seized her, too; made her invoke the Devil's love, and offer her sweet young body to change the strain of blood among that brood of imbeciles!*

Long Horror Novel  
by RUSSELL GRAY



**S**HE was the kind of girl you see in full-page advertisements in the swank magazines: a gorgeous blonde sitting behind the wheel of a gorgeous roadster. Only in this case, the roadster looked as if it would fall apart before it went another mile.

She asked: "Is this the way to Gring?"

Chet Blair leaned on the door and saw that her eyes were deep violet.

"Gring? Never heard of it."

Her curved lips pouted. "Isn't this Amton? I was told to pass through Amton and then branch off when I came to the foot of the mountains."

"Oh," Chet Blair said. "You must mean Doom. I suppose the natives call it Gring because they're all named that."

"Thanks," the girl said. The gears protested as she shoved them into first.

"Wait." Chet kept his hands on the door. "Why do you want to go to Gring or Doom or whatever it's called?"

The girl frowned. A girl as good looking as that would be used to men trying to get fresh with her. She evidently thought Chet's question was impudent.

"I'm the new school teacher there," she snapped. "Good-bye."

The car jerked forward, nearly pulling Chet off his feet.

"Hey!" he yelled after her. "Wait a minute!"

His only answer was the rattling of loose parts on the car. He stood in the middle of the road looking after her. Something was wrong. There was a reason why he should have tried to stop the girl from going on, but he couldn't think of what it was.

As he walked along the road, Chet Blair could see the rugged pile of purple mountains rising in the distance. The village of Doom was somewhere on the side of one of the mountains. He had been in Amton only a week and hadn't a very clear idea why the villagers lowered their voices when they spoke of Doom. Something about an inferior race, idiots, people who were sub-human.

And a beautiful young girl was to be their school mistress!

He stopped off at the Brickman farm for a glass of well-water. Dora, Arnold Brickman's pretty young wife, insisted

on pulling up the bucket for him and pouring the water into a glass. She stood too close to him as he drank; her breast, covered only by a thin gingham dress, brushed his arm.

Chet was drinking down the second glass when he saw Arnold Brickman himself coming toward them through the tomatoes. Brickman was twice his wife's age—gaunt, weather-beaten, a hard-working farmer. It was plain that Dora liked Chet. Nothing serious perhaps; just enough flirting with this handsome young city man to break the monotony of farm life. But Chet wasn't having any romance. He had come to Amton to get away from women and work.

Moving away from Dora, he waited for Brickman to come up to them. After discussing the abnormal heat and the danger of drought, Chet asked Brickman:

"What's wrong with a school teacher going to Doom to teach school?"

Brickman drew in his breath in a half laugh. "Everything. First, there's no school in Doom. Never has been."

"Perhaps they're starting one?" Chet suggested.

"What for? None of the Grings can read and write and they don't want to. They refuse to have anything to do with civilization. And even if they did want to learn, they can't. They're idiots, all of them."

CHET BLAIR fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. Perhaps Brickman wasn't fair to the natives of Doom. The thirst for knowledge was universal. But all the same, he didn't like the idea of that beautiful blonde being among the moronic Grings.

The conversation returned to the weather and after a while Chet departed. Dora Brickman waved after him, calling, "Come around more often, Mr. Blair."

The Tucker farm was next to the

Brickman's. Earl Tucker was Chet's brother-in-law. A couple of weeks ago Chet had written his sister Martha that he would like to get away from the city for at least a month; he was an advertising lay-out man and had worked too hard at his desk in the last three years and wanted to do nothing but lie in the sun and take long walks. Martha, of course, had invited him out immediately.

Lunch was on the table when he reached the farm house. Besides the two hired men, there was Earl Tucker and Martha, and Phyllis Osborn. Tucker was small, wiry, and bitter about trying to wrest a living from the soil; but he was chained to the farm because he'd never done anything else in his life. Martha was buxom, motherly and capable; five minutes in the house convinced a visitor that she was the head of the family.

Chet was extremely fond of his sister, but he resented the fact that she continually tried to interfere in his life. Like this business with Phyllis Osborn. Martha was convinced that it was time for Chet to marry and she had selected Phyllis as her future sister-in-law. She had invited her to stay for an indefinite period, and she made no attempt to disguise her motive. Phyllis was pretty in a gentle way, and timid as a mouse. All right for men who liked women that way. Chet didn't.

During the meal Chet was even more quiet than Phyllis. He hardly ate. Something was troubling him. It was about that blonde he had met on the road. He had a feeling that something was terribly wrong.

After the meal he selected a shady spot on the porch and started to catch up on his newspaper reading. He had the papers for a week at his feet.

Suddenly he straightened up in his chair and stared at a two-column photograph of an attractive girl in brief bathing costume. The caption read: "Most

Beautiful Teacher." Under the caption was a brief story to the effect that Miss Linda Hudson had been unanimously voted the most beautiful girl in the graduating class of the State Normal School.

She was the girl he had met on the road.

Chet tore out the photograph and stuck it in his pocket and left the house. Earl Tucker was about to climb into the seat of his tractor when Chet came up to him.

"Can you spare a couple of minutes, Earl?" Chet asked. When Earl nodded, Chet said: "Tell me all you know about the place called Doom."

EARL wiped his face with a bandana. "Not much to tell. It's been there long before the earliest settler came to Amton. And it's name isn't really Doom. The people of Amton gave it that name long ago, and they must have had a reason. I don't think it has a name—not even a post office name because nobody there ever gets mail. The place was settled during the revolution by a family called Gring, and they've lived there ever since, never mingling with the outside world. I've never been there and I've seen only one or two of the inhabitants. They're all—well, if you want to be kind to them, call them idiots. They've inbred till they've become something like beasts. Mad beasts, I hear."

"My God!" Chet said.

"But they won't be there much longer," Earl went on. "They say that no more children are being born to them. All the women have been sterile for the last twenty years—because of inbreeding, I guess. Though there are some in Amton who say that it's God's way of wiping them off the earth. It's a terrible curse to be hanging over their heads, and remember I said they are mad. And it's said in Amton that in their desperation they have made a pact with the devil, that they

possess strange and evil powers—and if their mad brains were ever to decide to use those powers. . .”

He paused and again ran the bandana over his face. Chet's jaw was set as hard as a rock. Earl said:

“Look Chet. If you're thinking of going up there to pay them a visit—don't. It won't be adventure. It'll be—I don't know. But a couple of years ago a young fellow and his wife passed through here on the way to Doom. They were anthropologists, they said, and were going to write a book on the Grings. We told them not to go, but they laughed at us. That's the last we saw of them. A few months later the girl's father came here looking for them. He hung around a few days, asking questions, then left and returned with four state troopers. They went up to Doom and came back the next day. The father's face was pretty bad; he looked like he'd seen a ghost. And the troopers—they shrugged and said they'd found no sign of the two and that's all there was to it.”

Without a word Chet turned away and made for the house. In spite of the heat he broke into a run. Earl Tucker stood up on his tractor and looked after him, scratching his head.

Chet got into his car and drove to the village of Amton. After a few inquiries he pulled up in front of a neat little frame house in the heart of the village.

Dan Jones, the constable, was sitting in his stocking feet listening to the radio. He was a solidly-built, ruddy-faced individual, and he shook hands with Chet without getting up.

“Chet Blair,” the constable said. “Heard of you. You're visitin' the Tuckers, ain't you?”

CHET blurted out the story of how he had met Linda Hudson on the road and showed him the newspaper photograph.

“Yeah?” The constable rubbed his chin with the back of a hairy hand. “Well, I'll tell you, Blair. Doom is out of my jurisdiction.”

“It's in the state's jurisdiction.” Chet protested. “They'll send troopers if you ask them to.”

“Me ask them to send state police because some people hire a school teacher who wins a beauty contest? Now I ask you, Blair: ain't that downright silly?”

“But the Grings aren't people. Not ordinary people. And you know enough about the Grings to know that the girl is in horrible danger.”

“Mebbe.” the constable said. “And mebbe not. And the state police don't know nothin' about them. How'll I look? They'll laugh at me.”

“Look here, Mr. Jones—” Chet began angrily.

The doorbell rang. Fat Mrs. Jones waddled through the room and opened the door. A man plunged into the room. He started speaking at once.

“Damn' it, Dan, you've got to find my Angie. She's been gone five days now.”

“Now, now, Jim,” the constable soothed. “Keep your shirt on. Angie is over twenty-one and her own boss. Can I help it if she runs away from home? And if we find her, we can't bring her back unless she wants to come.”

“She didn't run away,” the newcomer argued. “She had no reason to. Something's happened to her, I tell you.”

The constable shrugged his wide shoulders. “I done what I could. I sent out an alarm. You'll hear from her, Jim. A letter from some city, mebbe.”

Chet broke in: “Have many girls disappeared from Amton lately?”

“Many?” the constable said. “There ain't many girls in all of Amton. But now and then one leaves. You know how it is with these small-town girls: they read about the wild city life and get hankerin' after it. About two weeks ago

Nellie Robinson left. Pretty girl. Reckon she thought she could get on the stage."

"You fool!" Chet said.

The easy manner dropped from the constable. He scowled and started to get to his feet.

Then the wall telephone jangled. The constable lifted the receiver and said: "Yeah? . . . Yeah? . . . You sure? . . . Be right over."

"Got a call, Jim," he said, snapping the receiver on the hook. "We'll see what we can do about your Angie. . . . I'm goin' your way, Blair."

The constable eased himself into the front seat of Chet's car. He said to Chet: "That was your brother-in-law. Says he found a girl wanderin' on his farm. She was stark naked and nearly dead."

"Angie?" Chet breathed. "Is that why you didn't want to tell Jim?"

"No. A girl named Nellie Robinson." His manner was serious now. "The girl I told you disappeared a couple of weeks ago."

CHET let go of the wheel for a moment to light a cigarette. There's something there in Doom, he thought. Something more horrible than we imagine. And that blonde girl went there.

All save Martha were on the porch of the Tucker house: Earl, Phyllis, Arnold and Dora Brickman and several hired hands.

None of them was talking; simply standing there with chalk-white faces.

"I found her wandering on my farm," Earl told the constable. "She hadn't any clothes on and her body was covered with dried blood. Arnold Brickman was working in the next field and I called to him and together we carried her to the house. She's upstairs in our bedroom."

Chet followed the constable up the stairs. Martha was sponging the girl when they came up.

Martha looked up. "Why doesn't Doc

Marvin come? The poor girl will die under my hands."

The girl was lying motionless on the bed. She must have been pretty a short time ago; she must have been clean-limbed, smooth-skinned. Now she wore a second skin of brown, flaky dried blood. Her eyes were open wide, staring at the ceiling.

As Chet looked at her with mounting horror, her lips moved. She said: "Doom."

The door flew open and a slim man in rimless eyeglasses entered. The doctor looked at the bed and gasped: "My God!"

There was an intense silence while the doctor examined her. He straightened up at last, shaking his head.

"She looks as if she had wandered into a thorn patch. Or perhaps was lashed with thorns. And look at her feet—torn, bloody. She must have walked a great distance over rocky ground."

Martha asked: "Will she live?"

"Possibly. I'll do all I can for her. But" —he hesitated— "strictly outside of my profession, I almost think she'll be better off dead. Her mind seems to be gone—forever, I fear. Now please leave me alone with her."

As the door shut behind her, Chet heard the voice of the girl saying, "Doom."

On the porch Martha repeated to the others what the doctor had said. Their faces turned a shade whiter. Phyllis moved over to Chet and grasped his arm.

"Now you'll believe me," Chet said savagely to the constable. "Whatever happened to that girl was done in Doom."

The constable had sat down. He stretched his legs lazily. "You're letting your imagination run away with you. Some fiend abducted her and held her prisoner for a while and did that to her. By God, I'll find him!"

"If you look in Doom," Chet said stub-

bornly. "Didn't you hear her say that name over and over again?"

"Sure. She said doom. She knew she was doomed when the fiend started lashin' her with thorn whips. That word stayed in her mind."

"Damn you!" Chet said. "She managed to escape from Doom, walked all this distance. Didn't you see her feet? They were worn down almost to the bone."

THE constable stood up. His face was angry now. Every eye was on him and Chet.

"I'm not lettin' a fresh city fella tell me how to run my business," the constable snapped. "It's a good fifteen miles from here to Doom, and part of it a strong person with shoes on hasn't an easy time walkin' over. You're tryin' to tell me that Nellie Robinson, naked and half-dead, walked all that distance."

Chet had to make an effort to control his anger. "She's mad. Mad people have a strength and an endurance that sane people haven't. And what she's talking about is the town of Doom—that bit of hell up there which should have been cleaned out years ago. Damn it, you've got to do something. There's a girl on the way there—hired to teach idiots—madmen! We've got to save her."

The constable shrugged. "She went of her own free will. But all right, she shouldn't be there. I'll send in a report to the state police, that they should go up and fetch her."

"And how long will it take before they come?"

"Not long. Mebbe two-three days."

Chet said: "We've got to get her out before dark. How about a posse? Five or six men with guns ought to be able to bring her back."

Nobody said anything. His eyes moved over the faces of the men. No eyes met his.

"You cowards!" Chet spat out.

"Chet," Earl said. "You don't know the place. We do. We can't make it before dark and if they want to they can cut us down before we cock our guns. Maybe tomorrow."

"And if the girl don't want to come back, won't we look like fools," the constable put in.

Chet swung toward the steps. "Very well. I'll go alone."

Phyllis was still clinging to his arm. He dragged her with him a short way. "Chet, don't go! Please!" she implored.

Brutally he thrust her from him and ran to his car. As he kicked the starter, he heard Martha frantically calling to him and saw Earl running toward him. He was away before Earl could reach the car.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Road to Doom

THE dirt road which branched off the highway was hardly wide enough for a single car. Linda Hudson stopped the battered roadster and searched for a signpost. There was none. Yet this must be the road. A side road three miles beyond Amton, the letter had specifically stated.

She got out and searched and after a while she found it. Not a signpost; simply four letters scrawled on a boulder and under them a crooked arrow pointing toward the mountain above. The letters spelled the word "Doom" in a wavering script.

Doom! That was what the young man down the road had told her the village was called. She fumbled in her handbag for the letter. Tersely it offered her the position of school mistress at the rural school in Gring, naming a salary which was surprisingly large. The letter was signed: "Dorcas Gring, Elder of Gring."

The letter had arrived a day after her

graduation and she had considered it an extraordinary stroke of luck. She had no money, no relatives, no property save the ancient roadster, and teachers who had graduated three years before were still waiting for appointments. She had dispatched a reply at once that she would arrive within a few days.

Before again climbing into her car, she hesitated for half a minute. Something wasn't right. What had the rather handsome young man who had so impudently appraised her while she asked him the way to Gring, shouted after her? Now that she thought of it, it had sounded like a warning of some sort.

Nonsense! She was simply scaring herself for no reason. The sun was bright, the mountain was breath-taking in its splendor, and she would receive a bigger salary than she had dared hope for.

After she had gone a mile, the road became worse. A great deal worse. It looked as if nothing driven by a motor had ever gone over it. Boulders jutted up, threatening to rip out the rear end of the car. Trees crowded the road so closely that often she doubted if the car would fit between them. And always the road wound agonizingly upward.

After an hour Linda Hudson was ready to turn back. At close hand the mountainside had lost the magnificence seen from afar. She was going through a sparse forest where every tree was dead as if stricken by a curse, and rotting branches groped toward the sky like spectral fingers.

Icy chills slithered down her back. Even the sun was no longer warming—the sun which was dropping down behind the other side of the mountain. What sort of village was this, miles from nowhere, with, apparently, the only approach a road which was never used?

There was nowhere to turn the car around. The only possible way was forward.

And then, after forty more minutes of jarring and bumping and holding on to the wheel for dear life, what road there had been ceased to exist. Ahead rose rocks over which not even a tractor could have moved.

She sat back, panting. Now what? Would she have to spend the night in this God-forsaken place?

Then Linda saw the man. He sat on a boulder at the side of the road.

"Hello," she said, relieved at seeing a human being in this desolate place.

HE didn't move. The sun was dropping behind the mountain and in the failing light he looked like part of the rock.

Linda tried again. "Is this Gring or the road to Gring?"

"Yep."

That was all—that one word. No movement toward her; no further information.

"I'm the new school teacher," she told him. "Do I have to walk the rest of the way?"

"Yep."

She opened the door and started to get out. With one foot on the ground and the other on the running board, she paused. For the first time she really saw him. His mouth was half-open, drooling, and he hadn't much of a chin. There was a looseness about the lines of his face, a slackness as if the bones didn't quite hang together. And his teeth—a shudder shook her frame at the sight of them. They were long and sharp and discolored and hung over his lower lip. Like bared fangs.

And he looked like a beast; like a creature midway between the evolution of ape and man. A pair of torn trousers held up by a bit of rag was his only garment, and his entire body was covered with abnormally heavy hair. The hair was matted with dirt.

But it was his eyes which sent icy

rivulets through her blood; tiny eyes close together which burned with a feverish intensity as they remained unblinkingly focused on her. As if he were looking at her without any clothes on.

With an effort she downed the fear which clutched her. No doubt he was the village idiot who had been sent to await her arrival and show her the way to Gring.

She went to the back of her car, and as she fumbled with the lock of the trunk the idiot moved. He didn't walk; he shuffled over the ground, hardly lifting his feet. He stood close to her, watching, his drooling mouth still open. His breath was fetid, nauseating.

She stepped away from him. "That's my valise," she said. "Will you take it for me, please?"

"Huh!" he grunted and started to shuffle off. Then he stopped, turned. "Come!" he ordered gruffly.

By now anger had taken the place of the fear she had felt of him. What business had the School Board or whoever was in charge to send an idiot to meet her? She lifted the valise and went after him.

The valise was heavy and it grew heavier every second. The ground was rough and there wasn't even a footpath. Time and again her ankles twisted over the stony ground and once she stumbled and fell, tearing skin from her elbows. He made no motion to help her to her feet.

After a while she abandoned the valise. She'd send a sane person for it later. But the going still wasn't easy; her breath came in painful gasps and her clothes were pasted to her skin.

Twilight fell over the mountainside and she had a notion that on either side of her shadows moved. Peering into the semi-light, she could make out nothing definite. It might be the effect of the failing light on the rocks—or it might be

grey, slinking figures without definite form or substance.

Presently a girl approached them. She was short and broad and her only garment was a tattered dress which failed by several inches to reach her knees. Dully, stupidly, she gaped at Linda. She had the same feverish eyes as the man, the same slack facial lines, the same shuffling gait. Another idiot!

The man ran his arm around the girl's scantily clad waist and then the two moved on side by side. Linda's heart pounded furiously as she followed. Yet she did not attempt to return to her car. She was drawn after them as if by invisible strings.

THEY passed a tiny, rocky farm and she saw a farmer plowing his field. Instead of a horse, a sweating, panting woman was yoked to the plow. She too was clothed in but a single garment which was so drenched with sweat that it clung to her like a second skin. And as she stumbled and labored bare-footed over the rough ground, the man at the plow drove her on with a whip.

Linda stopped, rooted to the ground. God, what had she gotten into? This place was the home of sub-human beings!

Her guide grunted: "You coming?"

Her brain shrieked: *Flee!* Run back to the car before it's too late!

But she continued to stand there, gripped by a paralysis which was not wholly fear. Some hellish power which she could not understand held her there.

The man shuffled toward her. The grey, slinking forms about her thickened in an ever narrowing circle. She drew herself up, forced words through her throat which she realized with a quirk of horror she was not anxious to utter.

"I want to go back to my car. Take me back."

The idiot's burning eyes traveled from her face to her throat and stayed there.



His fangs bared, a thin white tongue flicked out between his discolored teeth. Then he stretched out his hand. A hairy, horny, filthy hand which closed over her breast.

Linda didn't cry out, didn't jump back. She stood perfectly still as he touched her. One side of her dress ripped; his fingers dug into tender flesh. Then his arms were about her and her loveliness was pressed against his hairy filth-smear chest.

Nausea churned her stomach, yet she made no resistance. *She couldn't!* As in a trance, she arched her body against his!

It was utterly horrible! She knew that she should claw at him, struggle no matter how futile it might be. But she was limp, helpless, devoid of will to resist. And she knew that in some hellish manner he was making her a thing like himself—utterly vile and bestial.

His hairy face snuggled into her graceful white throat. Sharp pain stabbed her momentarily. He had pricked the skin of her throat with his fang-like teeth! He was drinking her life-blood!

Horror and fear subsided. A lazy, sensuous sensation swept over her. She no longer cared what happened to her. This might be death—or worse, but it didn't matter.

There was a sound like a pistol shot. The heavy, sweaty body jerked against

her; the arms about her loosened. Linda sank to the ground and lay there fighting to draw breath into her lungs.

The snapping sounds went on, and now they were accompanied by animal-like howls. Looking up, she saw a bearded man lashing the idiot who had drunk her blood.

"I told you not to touch her till later," the bearded man said as he applied the whip. "She must be saved for us all. For the ceremony. I told you that. You've disobeyed again."

When the lashing had stopped, the idiot crawled a short way over the ground and slowly, ponderously, stood up. His eyes turned to Linda and stayed there, stayed on her white throat down which red blood still trickled. Hunger burned in his eyes.

Suddenly Linda felt very sick. The interruption had brought her back to normal. When she remembered how she had reacted to the idiot's embraces, she wanted to die.

AS she rose to her feet, her eyes met those of the bearded man, and all of a sudden she was more afraid of him than of anything or anybody else in this frightful place. He had the small feverish eyes of the idiot boy and girl, and in the intrinsic weakness of his facial muscles he was like them, too. But there was something stronger about him, something in-



## MISSING! ONE GROUCH

The worst grouches go up in smiles when Star Single-edge Blades go in your razor. Star is so keen that wiry whiskers give up meckly—and tender skins bask in comfort. Invest a dime in 4 Star Blades—famous since 1880. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.



**STAR** SINGLE-EDGE  
**BLADES 4 FOR 10¢**  
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

initely more domineering and evil . . .

Thickly she managed to get words past her lips. "I'm Linda Hudson. I was hired to teach school here. I have a letter signed by Dorcas Gring."

"Dorcas—that's me," the bearded man said. "We have waited for you."

And then she knew that she was doomed. This madman, the elder of Gring! School?

"I've changed my mind," she quavered. "I cannot accept the position."

Silently Dorcas pointed with the whip in the direction opposite from which she had come. And without thinking she started forward. A compulsion divorced from her will was urging her to follow his command.

After a few steps she stopped abruptly. "You can't keep me here," she blubbered. "I want to go back."

Agony seared into her back as Dorcas snapped the whip. Screaming, she staggered, righted herself, and then she was flying over the ground with the speed of terror. She lost a shoe, limped a few feet, kicked her other shoe off.

Once she glanced behind her and saw Dorcas coming after her. He wasn't running. Without lifting his feet more than an inch or two, he came as ponderously as a tank. The grey shapes were around her, and she seemed to hear a whispering coming from them, a subdued chuckling. They could close in on her whenever they wanted to. And Dorcas could catch her if he made the effort. But they were sure of her; they knew she couldn't escape them.

What breath was left in her burned in her throat. She couldn't go much further—and then. . . .

A clump of bushes higher than her head sprang up at her left. If she could get in there she might be able to lose Dorcas and the shapes. She plunged in.

Screams of agony husked from her throat. She was in a clump of murderous

brambles! And they were so thick that she could not pass between any two bushes without having a hundred needle-pointed thorns tear her clothes and gash her skin.

**W**ITHIN a minute her dress and slip were in tatters and she bled from numberless tiny wounds. Only the fact that she held bleeding hands over her eyes saved her from being blinded.

After the first agonizing shock she ceased to stumhle about. She forced herself to stand perfectly still. Out there Dorcas and the other madmen would be waiting for her. In here was excruciating death.

"Linda Hudson," a voice reached her. "Come!"

"No!" she shouted back. "No! I'd rather die in here."

"Come!"

Of their own accord her legs moved through the brambles. Again she was shrieking with pain, but she could not stop her forward motion. By the time she was in the clear again, her clothing was torn almost completely from her and her white skin was studded with scores of tiny globules of blood.

Dorcas was there with the whip, and crowded behind him were the formless grey shapes. Linda slumped to the ground at Dorcas' feet.

"Please!" she whimpered. "I've never harmed you. Please let me go!"

The whip descended on her defenseless flesh. She rolled over on her back, her skin twitching, and she lay like that as Dorcas' powerful arm moved up and down.

Fire criss-crossed her torso, but she did not scream. The pain was so exquisite—almost pleasant. She lay writhing, moaning with pleasure, and arched her body upward to receive the lash. She, too, must be mad!

Foolish to have feared pain. Pain could

be beautiful. This was life, feeling every nerve quiver as it was aroused to its utmost. Oh, beautiful, beautiful agony! The world didn't matter. Nothing mattered. She had become a monster revelling in pain and she knew it and did not care.

She moaned and whimpered and writhed and the grey shapes about her took up the cries of inhuman ecstasy.

Linda crawled along the ground and wound her arms about Dorca's stocky legs.

"Master!" she sobbed happily.

The whip remained motionless, dangling along Dorcas' heavy thigh. He said: "Come."

Linda nodded and pulled herself up to her feet. Practically naked, her lovely body streaked and flecked with blood, she walked forward, head erect, proud uncovered breasts rising and falling with diabolical exultation. And the grey shapes of Doom followed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Invasion from Hell*

AS Phyllis Osborn peered out of the window, she could hear the steady clicking of Martha Tucker's knitting needles behind her. Darkness had descended suddenly, prematurely, as if a storm were brewing. But no storm clouds rode the sky. In the far distance she could make out the dark hump of the mountain where the people of Doom lived. By this time Chet would have reached it.

Phyllis sighed. Chet didn't care for her and he never would. He was up there in Doom trying to bring back a girl he had seen for less than a minute, risking his life and perhaps more than his life for her.

The house was strangely silent. Earl Tucker had left several hours ago to take mad, tortured Nellie Robinson to the

County Hospital. What had been done to her? Whipped by thorns, Doc Marvin had said. Tortured by a sex fiend, Constable Jones had added. But Chet had insisted that she had been through some unbelievable horror up in Doom. And now Chet was up there. . . .

Phyllis turned from the window. "Martha, there's something queer going on in the night outside. I thought I saw grey shadows, like monstrous distorted human forms, flitting by the house."

Martha laughed warmly. "Nonsense, Phyllis. You're scaring yourself. Every frightened child imagines it sees strange shadows in the night."

"I guess so," Phyllis muttered and again looked out of the window.

The night fascinated her and she wasn't really afraid of the shapes. Martha was wrong. There was something out there calling to her. Perhaps it was the shapes. For a moment she had an almost overwhelming desire to tear off her clothes and, naked and with utter abandon, follow wherever the shapes led. Then the sensation passed and a deep flush suffused her cheeks.

"Are you worrying about Chet?" Martha asked in her most motherly tone. "He'll take care of himself, even in Doom. Nobody but poor halfwits live there. The men like to frighten themselves like children. But I know better. . . . Where are you going?"

Phyllis was nearly at the door. She didn't stop at Martha's words, but went on through the door and outside. Martha looked after her, then returned to her knitting.

Then Martha was on her feet, hurling her big body through the door as Phyllis screamed. She found Phyllis cowering on the bottom step, her hands covering her face, her frail shoulder trembling.

"Phyllis! What happened?"

Phyllis nestled her face into Martha's ample bosom. "Martha, save me! Some-

thing dreadful is happening to me. I looked out of the window and thought I saw those shapes again, and then somehow I found myself going outside. I don't know why; something stronger than myself was pulling me out of the house. And when I reached here one of the grey shapes was standing at the foot of the steps waiting for me. It touched me and its touch was as cold as death. And then, by the light which came through the door, I saw its face. I don't remember what that face looked like; I know only that it was horrible, not human. The sight of the face broke the trance. I screamed and then you were here."

"There, there," Martha soothed as one would a child. "It was only imagination. Those absurd stories the men have been telling about Doom have worked on your mind. Come into the house."

Martha placed a comforting arm about Phyllis' slender waist and started to turn with her toward the house. Then she stopped, calling into the darkness, "Who's that?"

A white form was approaching over the field from the direction of the Brickman farm.

"Who's that?" Martha asked again. Her voice wasn't as steady as before. Phyllis snuggled against Martha and started to sob.

**T**HE white form came on over the grass which fronted the Tucker house. It seemed to be gliding over the ground rather than walking.

Martha thrust Phyllis behind her. She wished that she had Earl's rifle, which hung over the fireplace, in her hands. She was a strong woman, physically and morally, and had twice the courage of the average man, but now she found that her heart was pounding like a trip-hammer.

Then Martha burst into laughter. It was more the expulsion of breath as a

vast wave of relief swept over her than it was a laugh.

"Why, Dora Brickman!" Martha exclaimed. "You did give us a scare. But what are you wearing? Where are your shoes and stockings?"

As she came nearer, it was plain that Dora Brickman had nothing on but a thin nightgown. Martha's heart started to pound again. There was something wrong tonight. She could sense the menace all about her, could sense something horrible closing in.

And Dora Brickman's face! There was a kind of ecstasy in it, and she moved as if she didn't see Martha and Phyllis at all. Her eyes were fixed on something beyond them and above them—were fixed on the brooding shape of a mountain far away.

"Dora!" Martha released Phyllis and grasped Dora's arm. "Dora, what's come over you?"

Dora tried to shake off Martha's grip. "Please don't stop me. I have to go. They called me."

"Who called you?" Martha demanded. Something cold slithered down her back. She wished that Earl were home.

"Doom," Dora said. "The people of Doom."

Furiously Martha shook her and Dora's head fell from side to side as if it were on hinges.

"For God's sake, snap out of it, Dora!" Martha shouted. "Dora, wake up! You don't want to go to Doom. You want to stay here with me."

The ecstatic light remained in Dora's eyes. She said: "Doom. I'm going to Doom."

Martha kept shaking her, but the strength had ebbed out of her arms. She was afraid, more afraid than she had ever imagined she could be. She clamped an arm about Dora's shoulders and started to lead her into the house.

"No," Dora said, digging her bare feet

into the grass. "They're calling me. I have to go to Doom."

Martha tried to force her into the house, and then the two women were struggling. Dora clawed at Martha's face, squirmed, and her voice rose to a shriek of despair.

"Don't hold me! Please don't. Don't you see that I have to go when they call?"

Martha was a great deal stronger than Dora, but she had difficulty holding the maddened woman. She gasped: "Phyllis, help me get her into the house."

Phyllis didn't answer. Maintaining a grip on Dora with one hand, Martha turned. Phyllis wasn't behind her.

"Phyllis!" Martha shrieked. "Where are you?"

Momentarily her grip on the other woman relaxed and Dora squirmed loose and broke into a run. Martha started to give chase, then stopped. Dora was running at a greater speed than any woman had a right to be capable of. Knowing that she couldn't catch her, Martha watched Dora's white form recede into the darkness toward the mountain where the people of Doom dwelt.

Martha went back to the house calling Phyllis. No answer. Phyllis wasn't around the house or anywhere inside.

**M**ARTHA sank into a chair, exhausted. There was a great numbness inside of her, and she knew that when the numbness passed terror would take its place. As soon as she had caught her breath she was up again. She mustn't let the terror possess her; mustn't pause until she had found Phyllis.

Standing on a chair, she lifted the repeating rifle from the brackets above the fireplace. In a drawer she found a flashlight. Then continually calling Phyllis' name, she went again into the night.

Now she too became aware of the grey shapes gliding about her. She kept flashing her light about her, but the grey shapes melted into nothingness under the

illumination. Imagination, that's all, she kept assuring herself. But it didn't do any good. She knew that the shapes were there.

And then, at the edge of the corn field, she found the pile of clothes. Her flash revealed the thin summer dress, the fragile silk underthings, the sheer stockings and the white shoes, all piled neatly on the ground as if their owner had leisurely stepped out of them. It required only a glance to show her that they belonged to Phyllis.

She kept her flash on the clothes, staring, held in an unrelenting grip of horror. Dora Brickman, attired only in a nightgown had gone toward Doom driven by some devilish compulsion. And now Phyllis, without a sound or a struggle, had stepped out of her clothes, and had wandered off toward Doom—naked!

God, what abominable horror had gripped Amton? What—

The grey shapes made no sound as they swooped out of the darkness. The first was almost on her before she was aware of their coming. The beam of her flashlight rested on a grey distortion hurling itself forward. Instinctively her arm jerked the rifle up and her finger pulled the trigger. The grey shape halted in midair, seemed to hover about her.

Then the flash and the rifle were knocked out of Martha's hands and she was on the ground. A grey mass smothered her.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Linda—A Monster!

**N**IGHT had fallen before Chet Blair was halfway up the mountainside. His car moved over the tortuous road hardly faster than a man could walk. In his impatience he might have abandoned the car and gone the rest of the way on

foot if he had dared to leave the friendly beams of the headlights. All around him was ominous blackness.

After a while he had a peculiar sensation that he was not alone. Several times he dropped his hand on the snub-nosed automatic which lay on the seat beside him and peered intently into the darkness. But there were only the dim outlines of dead trees on either side of the road—trees which seemed to be swaying toward him with outstretched corpse arms and from whose cores a hollow wailing, as of dead souls in agony, arose. That was the wind, of course.

But there were *things* which followed the car and glided at its side. Increasingly Chet became convinced of that, and no amount of cursing himself for a scared fool did any good. This was the land of Doom, and there was something even worse than madness here.

At length his headlights picked out Linda Hudson's car directly ahead. Taking his gun, he slid out from behind the wheel and inspected the other car. Obviously, she had left the car here and walked the rest of the way. Doom would be still higher; the thing to do would be to keep on upward.

He was about to return to his own car for a flashlight when blobs of solid darkness separated from the rest of the height and rushed at him. They were on him before he had a chance to thumb the safety catch of his gun. They came without a sound of feet on the hard ground, and they flung themselves at him in overwhelming numbers. They were grey and shapeless, his headlights showed him as he went down, and then he was fighting for his life.

He couldn't tell if they were men or beasts or some creatures from a nether world. With the strength of desperation he struck out at them, battling grimly and silently. Somehow he managed to make his way up to his feet. The grey waves re-

ceded and charged, fell away under his bludgeoning blows, and came on again.

Always they came again, putting up not much of a fight, knowing that their numbers and persistence would prevail in the end. And Chet knew it too as he felt his arms turn to lead. He had lost his gun during the first attack. But would it have done any good? Could these creatures be killed in the same way as human beings?

Suddenly he dropped his arms, lowered his head, and charged downhill. Grey shapes scattered before him. The abruptness of his charge had taken them by surprise. Flight was his only hope. He had come to rescue Linda Hudson, but what help could he be to her if he were dead?

He was almost free of them. Another spurt and—

Part of the night solidified and a grey mass lurched at him. He tried to swerve, felt something glance off the side of his head, and the sky started to fall down on him. But he kept running, driven on by his reflexes like a decapitated chicken. He was blind and there didn't seem to be any ground under his feet, but his legs went on moving.

For ages he continued to run somewhere between the sky and the earth, and then at last he sank down on the ground and it was very good to be resting at last and feel soft fingers gently stroking his forehead.

HE opened his eyes and the darkness was still there. But under his head was soft flesh—a woman's thigh. He reached up; his hand touched a woman's face. Instinct told him who it was.

"Linda," he whispered. "Linda Hudson."

The girl shifted. "You are awake," she said. "It was strange the way you ran from the grey things, like a blind kitten in a room full of furniture. You

stumbled over stones, crashed against trees, but you kept going as if guided by Providence. And then suddenly you collapsed behind this boulder and I came to you here. You're the young man I spoke to on the road this afternoon."

"Yes, Chet Blair. Where are those grey shapes. Why didn't they follow me here?"

"Because just then the fire was lit and they melted away. Perhaps they can't stand fire because they are things of the darkness."

He sat up unsteadily. There, higher up on the mountainside, he saw the glow of the fire. The flames were hidden by huge boulders and the uneven terrain.

He turned to the girl. The fire must have been enormous, for even at that distance it shed enough light to reveal Linda Hudson in silhouette. His arm slid about her waist and with a sigh of pleasure she leaned against him. Under his hand he felt warm flesh and wisps of silk.

"Who are those grey things?" he asked.

"I don't know. Not human beings. Not even as human as the Grings. I heard things since I came here—whispers, mutters. The Grings are cursed; for many years no children have been born to their

women. And they've made a pact with the devil for their souls, and the grey things are their souls."

Chet laughed. The laugh sounded eerie, unreal, in that place. "You believe that?"

"Yes," she said with childish simplicity. "I believe anything about Doom. Whoever named it knew what was here. Doom for those who live here, Doom for those who come. The Grings made a pact with the devil and still they are dying. Tonight they will try something else; something so terrible that we civilized people cannot comprehend it. That was why they sent for me."

He tried to brush away the darkness with the intensity of his stare at her; she remained only a lovely silhouette. But in a way his hands could see—could tell that she was almost nude, could feel the roughness of what might be dried blood which spotted the marble smoothness of her skin.

In a tight voice he said: "They've done something to you. Tortured you."

Her lips were suddenly against his mouth in a burning kiss. He had never been kissed like that or by a woman half as beautiful. For a moment he responded passionately; then brutally he pushed her away from him. There was something so

## DON'T TEAR YOUR "INSIDES" OUT WITH ROUGH CATHARTICS!

If you're constipated and you want a good cleaning out, you need a laxative—but you don't have to take any rough treatment along with it! Because there is a laxative that will give you a good cleaning out—but without those terrible stomach pains!

Ex-Lax gets thorough results—but smoothly, easily, without throwing your eliminative system out of whack, without causing nausea, stomach pains or weakness. And Ex-Lax is easy to take—tastes just like delicious chocolate!

For more than 30 years, Ex-Lax has been

America's favorite family laxative. Now it is *Scientifically Improved*. It's actually better than ever! TASTES BETTER, ACTS BETTER—is MORE GENTLE than ever. Equally good for children and grown-ups. 10c and 25c boxes at your druggist's.

Try the New Scientifically Improved

# EX-LAX

THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

utterly abandoned in that kiss that it frightened him. He had felt as if she had been trying to draw his soul out through his lips.

Roughly gripping her shoulders, he demanded: "Why aren't they guarding you? They wouldn't go to all that trouble to bring you here and then give you a chance to run away."

"Run away?" she echoed in a puzzled tone. "They were nice to me. Dorcas whipped me. Ah, it was so lovely, the exquisite pain."

Chet felt his scalp tighten as if in a vise. God, what had happened to this girl? He'd seen her for only a minute or two on the road, but he was certain that he hadn't been mistaken in her. She'd been a normal, decent, healthy girl. And now, after a few hours here in Doom. . . .

He remembered that he had matches in his pocket. Queer that he should have forgotten them—perhaps, because any product of civilization would be forgotten in this cursed place. He struck a match and Linda Hudson's face leaped out of the darkness.

**I**N that flickering, mellow light she looked even more beautiful than when he had seen her on the road. Only—only some intrinsic change had taken place in her. A strange, avid fire burned in her violet eyes, and she swayed toward him.

Shifting the light down to her body, he cried out in rage. The tatters of dress and slip which still hung on her hid none of the perfection of her splendid body. Nor were any of the scores of brown dots which covered her from feet to shoulders hidden, nor the ugly welts made by a whip.

The match went out. He exclaimed: "You poor girl! The pain must be frightful."

Her body was against his and her laugh sounded in his ear. "It was intoxicating, like wine. I never knew how

magnificent pain could be. You'll beat me, too, darling. You'll love me and beat me!"

Her lips were again on his mouth. He remained rigid, numbed by sheer horror. She was moaning huskily, writhing against him; and suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his lips and tasted the cloying sweetness of his own blood.

He jerked up to his feet, thrusting her away from him. This was a nightmare. Or else he must be ready to believe anything; to believe that this girl, who, he was certain, had been essentially decent several hours ago, had become a vampire, a thing without a soul. Perhaps her soul was now one of those grey things with which he had fought.

Incredible thought! But anything could happen here in the land of the bestial and dying race which inhabited Doom.

He pulled her up to her feet and she went heavily against him. With a hand clamped lightly around her throat, he kept her face away from his.

"We're getting out of here," he said. "My car can't be far away."

"Lover!" she moaned. "Kiss me!"

He slapped her resoundingly on the face as one does an hysterical person.

She whimpered with pleasure. "More! Beat me!"

With sudden determination he swooped her up in his arms and started to carry her downhill. She wound her arms about his neck and groped for his lips.

"Linda, in heaven's name!" he cried. Then his tone changed and he spoke to her as if she were a child. "You're Linda Hudson, a school teacher, a respectable, civilized girl. Doom is a terrible place. You want to leave it. Together you and I—"

"No!" she shrieked as she realized that he intended to carry her away from Doom. "I want to stay here. Let me down!"



She twisted in his arms, pounded his face with small fists. He reeled, found himself falling. The blow had weakened him more than he had imagined. He dropped her, then let his weight fall on her, pinning her to the ground. She squirmed like an eel and clawed up at him with hooked fingers.

"Linda, please!" he pleaded with her. "I want to take you home. You don't like Doom. It's evil and you're good."

His words were useless. She continued to struggle, desperately, endlessly, with a strength that could not have been her own. He saw at last that there was but one way to get her away from Doom. He aimed a blow at where he imagined her chin was, but his fist struck only air. Then, as he went to grab her again, her nude body slipped out of his fingers. Throwing himself forward, he managed to grab a slim ankle. She fell heavily to the ground and lay still.

Lighting a match, he saw that she wasn't unconscious. She lay on her back, her violet eyes glaring up at him, her teeth bared in an animal snarl.

They've taken her soul away from her, he thought dully. They've done something to her too horrible to imagine.

But all the same he couldn't leave her here among these monsters. He dropped the match and stooped to lift her again in his arms.

"Help!" she screamed. "He wants to take me away from Doom. Help me!"

The night was suddenly alive with the grey shapes. Chet straightened up, fighting. They must have been afraid of him because of the good account of himself he had given in his previous fight with them, for they kept their distance, their monstrous distorted greyness slithering and gliding about him, always barely out of reach, always surrounding him.

Then he heard bare feet pattering away from him, heard golden mocking laughter. The grey shapes receded, faded into the

blackness of the night. He stood breathless and weary and alone. Linda Hudson's laughter grew fainter and fainter and died away.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Devil's Cross*

**W**EARINESS and sheer horror held Chet motionless as he stared in a kind of daze at where the huge fire sent a semi-circle of dull light into the night sky. It did not occur to him that he still had a chance to escape from Doom. He had come to rescue beautiful Linda Hudson and his gravest fears for her had not even hinted at the frightful fate which had overcome her. And the worst was still in store for her.

But how could he, singlehanded, fight against the mad people of Doom and the dreadful grey shapes which were their allies? Then he remembered the gun he had dropped when the shapes had attacked him.

He found his car more easily than he had hoped. Standing on the highest boulder, he saw the twin dots of the headlights. Stumbling in the darkness, he slowly made his way in the direction of the car. Above and behind him a shout poured from many throats—a sort of rhythmic chant endlessly repeated.

Linda had mentioned that the Grings would indulge in some dreadful ceremony to overcome the curse of sterility. And that she would be a central figure in the ceremony. That chant doubtless announced its beginning.

He hurried his pace. Several times he fell in the darkness. There wasn't any time to be lost, but without the gun he would be helpless.

He was fifty feet from the car when he saw the shadow. It flitted past the edge of the beam cast by the headlights and then melted into the darkness. One of the

grey things guarding his car? Perhaps. Chet moved forward cautiously.

The shadow loomed up suddenly directly in front of him. Chet heard the sharp intake of surprised breath, saw a club-like object jerk out from the figure. Chet hurled himself forward without taking time for thought. He felt his body strike flesh and he went down with the body under him.

There was a grunt, a cry, and then hands were flailing up at him. Dropping his head inside the blows, Chet groped for a throat, found it, and strove to tighten his fingers on the windpipe.

A voice beneath him cursed breathlessly, harshly. Abruptly Chet's fingers relaxed.

"My God, Earl!" he cried.

"You, Chet!" Earl Tucker gasped. "Thank heaven! I didn't know what struck me."

Chet rose to his feet and helped his brother-in-law up. Together they moved into the beams of the headlights. The club-like outline Chet had seen was a rifle which Earl carried.

"You came after me?" Chet asked. "Martha sent you to bring me back?"

"No. We didn't think you were in any danger, although I made Dan Jones promise he'd sent a posse up here if you didn't return by morning. But Chet—they have Martha!"

Chet had been looking in his car for a flashlight as Earl talked. Sitting in the front seat, he jerked his head toward Earl.

"Martha! Who has her?"

"The Grings. And they took Phyllis too."

"Good Lord!" Chet whispered.

"I went with Doc Marvin to take Nellie Robinson to the hospital," Earl explained in a tense voice. "When I returned nobody was home. But there were lights on in the house, so I became worried and started to search the fields. After a while

I came across the body. It was covered from head to foot in some sleazy grey material. When I pulled back the hood, I saw the idiot face of a Gring. God, Chet, do you know what that means? The Grings have come down to Amton!"

CHET had found the flash and now he was searching for his gun. His hand wasn't steady as the beam covered the ground where he had fought.

Earl strode after him. "He'd been shot with a rifle and mine was gone. Martha must have shot him. And then a couple of feet away I found Phyllis' clothes. They hadn't been torn off her; they'd been piled neatly on the ground as if she'd stepped out of them."

The gun! Chet scooped it up and demanded: "Where are the others? We may be too late already."

"Others?" Earl said in a dazed sort of way. "I'll be damned! I didn't think of getting help. I went crazy when I saw Martha was gone. I grabbed up the rifle and ran to my car and drove here like mad. What do you think they'll do to her? God, she might be dead! And that fire, that chanting, what does it mean?"

Chet had Earl by the arm and was leading him toward the fire. The going was comparatively easy with the flashlight.

Chet said bitterly: "You damn fool!" "I'm sorry, Chet. I deserve to be kicked. But we have guns. Together we ought to get Martha and Phyllis back."

Yes, they had guns and now he knew that the grey shapes were vulnerable, that they were Grings in grey robes and could be killed by bullets. But still—there was Linda Hudson's strange behavior and the fact that modest, mouse-like Phyllis Osborn had apparently disrobed of her own free will.

"Can't you hurry?" he urged Earl irritably.

Why was his brother-in-law moving so slowly when every second was of prime importance? And then a terrible suspicion crossed his mind. Perhaps Earl knew more of Martha's disappearance than he had stated. He recalled that several days ago Earl and Martha had had a violent quarrel. Earl was sick of farm life, wanted to throw it up, and he had accused Martha of keeping him chained to the soil.

Linda Hudson said she had received a letter from the Grings, but the Grings didn't know how to write. Perhaps somebody in Amton had arranged to supply victims to the Grings for their dread ceremony in return for wealth in some form. Here would be a chance for Earl to get away from the farm and also get rid of Martha.

No! Impossible thought. Yet Chet dropped a little behind Earl and kept his automatic ready.

The chant grew steadily louder as the two men neared the fire. And then suddenly the chant broke off and there was a dead silence save for the crackling of the fire. They could see the flames now between a row of enormous dead trees. Stooping, they went forward noiselessly until they reached a tree whose trunk could easily hide both of them from the multitude around the fire.

There were about a hundred of them ranged in a wide semi-circle about the fire. The men wore only trousers, the women brief dresses which clung to their torsoes. All looked alike—brutal, the men hairy, the women broad and heavy, and they squatted on their haunches like the apes to whom they seemed closer than to mankind.

There were no children. The youngest was at least twenty years of age. After that no offsprings had been born to the inhabitants of Doom.

Between the squatting horde and the fire there was a tremendous stone slab

which rose a good six feet from the ground. Its top was as smooth as a marble table and on it stood six of the women of Doom.

Save for girdles which appeared to have been hammered out of solid silver, they were nude. The fire bathed their broad thighs with mellow light, and shadows flickered and darted over their heavy breasts and thick abdomens. They stood as motionless as statues.

AS Chet looked, a head appeared above the further rim of the stone slab, then tiny eyes in which the fever of madness blazed, then a face as imbecilic as the others and a long matted beard. He had come up on stone steps on the other side of the slab. From neck to feet he was clad in a grey robe.

"Dorcas!" the people of Doom chanted "Save us from our curse!"

Two other grey-clad figures appeared and took up places on either side of Dorcas. And bringing up the rear came a slim, lovely girl who was stark naked.

Earl gripped Chet's arm. "Angie Bel-lows!" he whispered hoarsely.

Angie, the girl whose father had rushed into Dan Jones' home demanding that something be done about the disappearance of his daughter! Chet started around the tree.

"Hold it, Chet," Earl said between his teeth. "It's not as easy as we thought. They have guns too, better than ours. Look at what's in the hands of that grey fella near the right end of the mob."

For the first time Chet noticed that there were grey robed figures also at the edges of the crowd. Not many; six at the most, and each had his face covered by a grey cowl. And of the six, five held rifles in their hands—the sixth a tommy-gun!

Bitterly Chet thought that no race of savages, no matter how completely it rejected civilized man's offer of the comforts of science, did not eagerly accept his in-

struments of destruction. The people of Doom had spurned all of civilization save civilization's weapons. Only the grey-robed figures, who were evidently high-priests or picked men, were armed, but they were sufficient. What chance would he and Earl have now?

Angie Bellows walked to the end of the platform nearest the fire and stood with hands upraised toward the fire as if in benediction. The fire must have been terrifically hot that close, but she did not retreat or cringe as the flames licked toward her, bathing her clean, slim body with yellow and red. And there was no fear in her face; no emotion at all.

Behind her the man named Dorcas started to chant. The two other robed figures took up the chant, and then the six nearly nude girls went into a writhing, ecstatic dance of unadulterated evil.

Then Chet almost cried out as the girls, dancing forward, spread out, and he saw who had been behind them all the time. Linda Hudson stood there, slim and regal and incredibly beautiful in the shimmering light of the flames. She wore a silver girdle and silver breast-plates and a silver crown of elaborate and intricate design. And she too was dancing that unspeakably vile dance!

And directly in back of her wildly undulating torso, against which she leaned her back, was a thing of the devil himself. An inverted cross of solid silver!

Devil worshippers! Linda had told him that the Grings had made a pact with the devil to save them from the curse of sterility. This was one of their ceremonies, and somehow they had already managed to transfer the souls of Linda Hudson and Angie Bellows to Satan.

As he stood transfixed behind the tree and felt Earl's hand open and close convulsively on his arms, he made out the sense of the chant Dorcas was monotonously intoning.

"... another offering, thou mighty

King of Evil. Be merciful to your wretched disciples and withdraw this curse of childlessness which plagues us."

He took a single step backward—and suddenly, without a word or gesture of command, Angie Bellows hurled herself from the stone platform. It was impossible for a person to leap that distance, yet straight into the heart of the blaze that white body flew.

No sound passed her lips, not even when she plunged into the midst of the fire and the flames leaped and crackled greedily. Horror-stricken, Chet watched a blackened mass stagger erect and throw up charred arms in a desperate gesture toward the sky. A single pathetic wail rose from the flames. Then slowly she crumpled and vanished into the heart of the inferno.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Hell's Nuptial

CHET raised his automatic and took careful aim at Dorcas. Earl's rifle was up to his shoulder, and he said grimly: "Okay, Chet, here goes. I'll take the fella with the tommy-gun. This'll be the last thing we ever do, but it'll be worth it if we get a few of those monsters."

Chet's finger contracted on the trigger. But his gun never spoke. A grey wave swept up from behind and engulfed the two men.

Those grey shapes must have been there behind them all the time, waiting for Chet and Earl to make the first move—shapes which were in some hideous and indefinable way unlike the Grings dressed in grey robes. Chet went down under the wave, felt himself swept up and borne along as by a giant breaker. Wind and resistance were knocked out of him as he floundered on the ground like a fish on dry land.

Then the wave receded and he lay at the foot of the stone platform, arms and

legs tied with stout rope. Looking up, he could see one side of the stone slab's top; could see Linda Hudson motionless now against the inverted cross, her face a vast soul-less blankness.

And he could see Dorcas looking at something on the ground with those tiny eyes of his burning more feverishly than ever. Chet twisted his head, saw three of the grey-robed figures carrying Earl Tucker up the stone steps. Earl twisted insanely in their arms, fighting, clawing, his mouth open in a perpetual scream. Step by step they forced his struggling body up to the platform.

A woman screamed, high-pitched, hysterically, from among that multitude of sub-human creatures who giggled and simpered as their mad eyes were fixed on the platform. Chet's sister screaming! Martha, still in possession of her soul and her will, being forced to watch whatever frightful fate was in store for her husband.

Chet tore wildly, futilely, at his bonds, adding his own voice to those of his sister and brother-in-law. Then he subsided into a choked gasp of despair as Earl was lifted high over the heads of the three robed figures and lurled like a bundle of straw into the roaring fire. From where he lay, Chet could not see the fire, but he could hear Earl's agonized shrieks, could hear the hungry crackling of the flames as once again they were fed human fuel.

Then all eyes turned to Chet. The grey-robed men descended the steps and approached him. This was death, this was the end; and Martha and Linda and Phyllis as well were doomed.

Dorcas' voice rang out. "Not yet. We will save the second intruder for the end. First the marriage and the nuptial."

The grey figures retreated. There was a long-drawn silence during which Chet could hear the pounding of his heart. The creatures of Doom sat forward on their haunches, tense, expectant. Then all

eyes shifted to a young man who stepped out of their ranks.

He was attired in a shimmering robe of silver chain which tinkled as he moved toward the platform. A chant arose from the people of Doom, low, sing-song, endlessly repeated. Gravely the youth—he seemed to be about twenty years of age, evidently the last-horn of the Grings—ascended the stone steps and went to the side of Linda Hudson. She stepped forward to meet him and his arm slid about her slender waist. His tiny eyes devoured her loveliness and he giggled insanely.

God! What was about to happen became clear to Chet. Linda was to become the bride of this idiot, this madman. In their insane despair, the Grings were going to mate their youngest male with a beautiful girl from the outside world!

AGAIN Dorcas was intoning a prayer to Satan which rose above the chant of the onlookers. The youth fumbled at his shoulders and the silver robe fell from him, crumbling with a clang to the stone platform. Underneath that robe he wore only a loin cloth.

Chet's stomach turned with revulsion as he gazed up at the platform. He was the ugliest male Chet had ever seen—even uglier than the other Grings. Over a century of inbreeding had produced a hideous caricature of the human body, a cretin whose bloated abdomen was the color of a fish's belly, whose skin was flaked and scaly and filthy.

Sheer disgust forced Chet to avert his eyes. When he looked up again, Linda had removed her breast-plates and was pulling off the silver girdle. Eyes blazing with passion, her gorgeous nude body undulating tantalizingly, she went into the monster's arms.

Dorcas intoned: "And in return for the souls of the victims we offer you while this marriage is consummated, answer our entreaties, O Ruler of Evil!"

This was to be the completion of the nightmare—that the nuptial would be consummated there on the platform before Chet's eyes and the eyes of the creatures of Doom!

With cries of pleasure which seemed to pour from a single throat, the Grings rose to their feet and formed two lines in front of the platform. The lines faced each other, and in the hands of each of the Grings was a thorn studded branch.

The dreaded gauntlet! Now Chet understood what had happened to Nellie Robinson. She had been forced to run that gauntlet; had been left for dead; had revived and, forever maddened as the result of the ordeal, had miraculously managed to make her way to the Tucker farm. And now there was to be another victim.

Phyllis Osborn! Alone, with nobody to guide her or force her through the gauntlet, she emerged from the shadows beyond the reach of the fire and approached the head of the two lines. She walked with frail shoulders squared, small firm breasts high, an eager smile on her lips. No blush dyed her cheeks nor did she indicate the least fear. Chet knew that it was not courage or defiance; knew that the Grings had made her into a being without a will.

And when she stepped between the two lines and the cruel thorn lashes rained down on her, sensuous laughter ripped from her throat.

On the platform Linda Hudson and the monstrosity she was to wed stood side by side before the inverted cross, drinking in the torment of Phyllis.

A hand fumbled at Chet's wrist. A voice whispered in his ear: "I'll have you free in a moment. Then run downhill and keep running until you reach Amton."

Chet twisted his head and found himself looking up at Dora Brickman's pretty face.

Quickly he glanced about. He lay in

the shadow of the stone slab and all eyes were turned toward the gauntlet. Phyllis was near the end of the two rows, stumbling, falling and rising—and always laughing.

So Dora Brickman was also one of the captives! How had she managed to elude her guards? How had she retained control of her will? Some hundred feet away the grey-robed man who carried the tommy-gun stood. If he could get to him and wrench the gun away from him. . . .

"Chet, darling!" Dora Brickman whispered as she struggled with the hard knots. "You don't care for me, but I—I—couldn't bear to see them throw you into the fire. Don't try to fight. And never mind me and the others. We're beyond saving."

And then she was shrieking wildly as the grey things materialized out of the darkness behind and hurled her forward in front of the platform. They swept over Chet and beyond him and a moment later were miraculously gone. Even in the light of the fire they had been distorted, indetermined, and Chet knew that they were not like the grey-robed Grings who carried the guns.

**T**HE gauntlet broke up and a hundred madmen gaped at Dora as she cringed in the clearing between them and the platform. Phyllis was a bloody, motionless horror on the ground.

Exerting every ounce of strength at his command, Chet tore at the bonds. Dora had loosened them somewhat, but not enough. Not quite enough. This was the end. The last hope gone. . . .

Dorcas' voice roared out like thunder. "A traitress in our midst! Death to her!"

"No!" Dora shrielled, clawing at her lips. "You don't understand. I wasn't doing anything. I was only— Oh, God, save me!"

Dorcas was descending the platform, a cruel black whip in his hand. He stood

over her as she grovelled at his feet, and he said. "The bushes."

"Not that! You can't! . . . Arnold, save me!"

And then a grey-robed figure carrying

a rifle stepped forward. "She's my wife," a desperate voice came from under the cowl. "You can't do that to her. We have a bargain."

Chet ceased fighting the ropes. Exhausted, utterly defeated, he sank back on the ground. Arnold Brickman!

It was all clear now. Brickman and his wife lured desirable women up to Doom for the dreadful rites and supplied the Grings with guns. In return they no doubt received large quantities of the silver which the Grings mined here. The Grings, isolated so long from civilization, must



have had no idea of the true value of their silver and must have paid the Brickmans lavishly. The thought of enormous wealth had undermined every ethical and moral standard they had possessed.

But in the end Dora Brickman had faltered. She, who had callously watched innocent young women frightfully tortured, had tried to free Chet with whom she must have fallen in love.

Arnold Brickman said: "Forgive her, Dorcas. She did not know what she was doing. We have kept our bargain with you."

"The bushes," Dorcas repeated.

The whip slashed down, biting into Dora's flesh. "Arnold!" she shrieked, pounding the ground in her agony.

Brickman raised the rifle. "Stop!" he husked. "Damn you, stop!"

Dorcas whirled toward him. "Would you defy Dorcas?"

"Hell, yes!" Brickman screamed, and his rifle roared.

Dorcas swayed like a giant tree about to topple, and like a tree he crashed ponderously to earth and lay still.

A scream of rage rose from the throat of every Gring. Brickman wheeled, fired once, then was swept down, tramped under two hundred feet. The horde of madmen stampeded on until Dora was also buried under it; and Chet would have been their third victim if a sudden piercing command, rising above their screams, had not suddenly halted them.

It was another man in grey who, standing at the edge of the platform, ordered them back. A Gring built as solidly as Dorcas and with a beard almost as long. Obviously he had taken the place of Dorcas as the leader of the Grings. Chet was apparently to be saved for an even worse fate—after the ceremony.

The creatures of Doom moved back from the platform and again squatted on their haunches in a semi-circle. Where they had been a minute before three

bodies lay. Or rather one body, that of Dorcas. There wasn't much left of Arnold and Dora Brickman and what there was wasn't in any one place. In their rage in seeing their leader slain they had literally torn the two apart. Nausea choked Chet.

A full-throated scream keened out from the stone platform and impulsively Chet's head jerked upward. What he saw on the platform gave him sudden renewed hope and strength and again he started to work furiously on his bonds.

For Linda Hudson was fighting the monster she was to wed!

SHE had awakened from the spell the Grings had cast over her; she had regained her soul. Perhaps it was the death of Dorcas which released her; perhaps the spell could endure only a certain length of time. Anyway, there she was, struggling in the arms of the youngest Gring, trying at the same time to cover her nudity from the eyes of that bestial multitude. Both attempts were equally hopeless. The youngest Gring giggled with idiotic delight as he held her squirming body against his repulsive chest.

A rope about Chet's wrist slackened. Dora must have loosened it. If he had time, only a few minutes more! Dear God, give him time!

The Gring who had taken Dorcas' place raised his hands. Immediately there was silence save for Linda's whimpers of despair as she continued the futile struggle. Once again the weird, sing-song chant arose—the chant which meant another stage in the dreadful rites, another hideous death.

Into the light of the fire another woman was dragged. It was Martha. And unlike Phyllis, she had somehow not succumbed to the spell of the Grings. Naked, she resisted every step of the way silently, courageously. Her body glistened with sweat as she fought, and two robed Grings had their bands full trying to hold her.



His sister's splendid courage sent Chet into a frenzy of effort. One wrist was almost loose. But would he be free in time? And even if he got loose . . .

The new ruler of Doom descended the platform and picked up the whip which Dorcas had dropped and went to Martha. Five times the deadly whip knifed into her body before Martha's resistance broke. Then she was screaming with agony and thrashing on the ground. It was more than even Martha's courage could endure.

All the while the chant continued, and as if to accompany it the whip rose and fell with monotonous regularity. Martha staggered up to her feet and started a stumbling retreat from the hellish pain. Slowly, inexorably, her tormentor followed, driving her into a direction he wanted her to take. Driving her toward a clump of bushes at the outer rim of the light cast by the fire.

Glancing once over her shoulder, she plunged into the bushes in a final effort to escape the torture. And then screams more terrible than any Chet had heard that night came from the bushes. The Grings continued their chant without interruption, but their tiny eyes glinted with sadism.

Chet guessed what those bushes were. Brambles! Tearing his sister's uncovered body to pieces! And the Gring with the whip stood there, waiting for Martha to come out so that he could drive her in again.

The screams in the brambles went on, but suddenly the Grings lost interest. All eyes turned to the platform.

Chet's heart went out of him. The marriage on the platform was about to be publicly consummated. And the bridal melody was to be Martha's shrieks of agony!

A frantic effort loosened one of Chet's wrists. With trembling fingers he tore the rope from the other wrist, started to pull the rope from his legs. Nobody saw him; at the moment nobody was interested in

him. He started to spring to his feet, knowing that he had no chance, knowing that the best he could hope for was to go down fighting.

And then Martha was running along the edge of the brambles.

SHE had emerged a hundred feet from where she had entered. How she could have managed to go that distance through those murderous brambles and still live, she herself could not have explained. Chet saw her when she was almost on the robed Gring who carried the tommy-gun. She was about to spring when the man turned. Chet was already on his feet, but he stopped dead in his tracks, not daring to breathe.

But the Gring just stared at Martha. She didn't look like a woman, like anything human. Her body was covered with a mantle of her own blood and she seemed a creature who had come straight from hell. And the others were too intent on what was happening on the platform to glance behind them.

Martha hurled her big body at the man. She wrenched the tommy-gun from his paralyzed hands. Then she was sending bursts of .45 slugs among the people of Doom.

They made no resistance. Like the man from whom she had taken the gun the Grings believed that she was a demon from hell and fled in mad panic. By the time Chet, who had skirted the clearing in order to avoid the bullets, reached her, not a Gring was in sight. When Martha saw her brother, she smiled weakly through bloody lips, handed him the tommy-gun, and fainted.

Linda Hudson was whimpering hysterically and getting into the silver girdle when Chet ascended the stone slab. She was alone on the platform. When she saw Chet, she fell into his arms and, unashamed, clung to him as if she would never let him go.

The sun was rising when Chet and Linda and Martha reached the Tucker farmhouse. Then Chet went on to Amton, and shortly after grim-faced men with guns, lead by Constable Dan Jones, set out for Doom. It was only the presence of state troopers, who came several hours later, that prevented the people of Doom who remained alive from being massacred. The state does not kill madmen, but it puts them away where they can do no further harm.

For three days the mountainside was scoured until the last of the Grings was rounded up. Two things, however, were never learned.

Who or what were the grey shapes of Doom? Not the grey-robed Grings, for Chet was ready to swear that the undetermined grey things against which he had fought and which had swept him and Earl Turner into the midst of the clearing were in some unspeakably horrible way not the madmen of Doom. And Linda Hudson, although she had completely returned to normal, still insisted that they were the souls of Grings who had sold themselves to the devil. She was laughed at, of course; but. . . .

Well, three days of search turned up only nine of the grey robes, and Chet remembered nine robed figures in front of him when the grey things had struck

from behind. One of the Grings might have burned the other robes—but why?

And from the captured Grings themselves there was no explanation. They either did not understand the questions or pretended not to understand. Nor could they shed any light on the second unexplainable thing. How had Linda and Phyllis and Angie Bellows been deprived of their wills, their souls; turned temporarily at least into she-demons?

Arnold or Dora Brickman might have drugged them; might have slipped into their homes and placed the stuff in their food. But none of the men, or Martha, had fallen under the spell. Perhaps they hadn't eaten that particular food. But how could Linda have been drugged? No food since she had eaten lunch in a city forty miles from Amton had passed her lips. And why had the spell over her suddenly been broken with the death of Dorcas?

These questions had no answers. Dorcas might have known. Perhaps it was just as well that there were no answers. They might have been too frightful for human sanity.

Love and the passing of time healed the scars of that night of horror. Yet later, when Chet and Linda were married, they would sometimes clutch each other in a panic of fear, wondering if her love for him might turn her back into the she-demon who had striven to drink his blood.

THE END

**NOW! THIN  
GILLETTE  
BLADES**



**4 FOR  
10c**

8 FOR 19c

● Thin-blade shavers, here's good news for you. Gillette announces a Thin Blade of true Gillette quality at a price you'll be glad to pay. Precision-

made to fit your razor perfectly, it gives real shaving comfort at a big saving. Ask your dealer for *Thin Gillette* in the new red-black package.



# DISCIPLES OF DEATH

No. 3—The Satanists

by John Kobler

*A premium on Black Magic and debauchery!*

**I**N THE section of Paris known as the Porte Saint Denis there is a ramp flanked by high, narrow houses. Behind them stretches limitlessly a maze of dark back streets. Aside from its brothels, its noisy, third-rate taprooms and grubby little shops, the district is drab and colorless. The tourist rarely visits it.

Yet three centuries ago those same high, narrow houses concealed weird, interlocking societies of evil, magicians and witches, whose practices still send a shudder along the spines of those who have studied their dread secrets.

They were the Satanists, vulture-like creatures feeding on the manners and morals of the epoch, an epoch unsurpassed in its corruptness, its lustfulness, its brutality. For this was the hey-day of Louis XIV, the Sun-King. Outwardly gay, extravagant, brilliant, the monarch's

court seethed below the surface with a festering of vile passions and vicious purposes . . . Louis ageing mistresses scheming to retain their power . . . court ladies poisoning husbands and lovers . . . sons murdering fathers with the fearful "powder of succession" or white arsenic . . . unwanted infants butchered . . . and all bloodily worshipping Satan in spirit and fact.

Out of this boiling stew-pot of murder and lechery and Devil-worship sprang the Satanists of the Porte Saint-Denis. They were many, but the most sinister, the most venomous, was the human harpy known as Catherine Montvoison, popularly La Voison. To her perfumed, dark house on the Rue Beauregard streamed nobles and rich commoners, masked and cloaked and each suckling some evil purpose. In the murky, tapestried ground-floor "confes-

sional" they would pay over huge sums to La Voison and her band of unfrocked priests and skilled murderers.

She was a plump, ruddy-faced woman with gleaming bird-like eyes. She invariably wore heavy brocaded robes costing a fortune. Her voice was low and toneless, her manner suggestive and sinister. A humble woman by birth, she had been married to a haberdasher, Antoine Montvoison. She started her professional career harmlessly enough as a mid-wife, dabbling in strange herbs and patent medicines. Later, she went in for horoscopes, fortune-telling and various types of necromancy. It was the demands of evil courtiers which finally led her along the paths of crime.

Two separate accounts of this unscrupulous woman give a well-rounded picture of herself and her clientele. According to Nicholas de la Reynie, the police commissioner who finally encompassed her downfall, "Every morning she rose people were waiting for her, and she had visitors for the rest of the day; after that, in the evening, she kept open house, engaged fiddlers and enjoyed herself thoroughly. She entered society. She was brought into fashionable drawing-rooms as the principal guest: pleasure parties from the Marais and Saint-Germain visited Villeneuve and were entertained on the lawns and beneath the shades of trees. They did not know that beneath the same shade, under those same lawns, were interred the bodies of infants murdered by La Voison and her gang—pitiful, unwanted infants to whom, it may be, death was merciful in its quick coming, infants of prostitutes, infants, too, of some of the fine ladies who disported themselves above the unmarked and unsuspected graves. For La Voison sank deeper and deeper into every form of vileness; her very success dragged her from slough to slough."

Again, W. Branch Johnson in his "The Age of Arsenic" wrote: "It was funda-

mentally her business sense that proved her undoing: in exploiting the credulity of her contemporaries she not merely fell foul of the law but sank below the lowest standards of decency. She trafficked in poisons of all sorts; she pandered to the licentiousness of the age; she performed or caused to be performed, innumerable illegal operations; she confessed to murdering two thousand five hundred infants; she was guilty of the grossest blasphemy and filthiest conduct in the performance of Black Masses."

**T**HE Black Mass! It was in this that La Voison and her associates attained their greatest degree of vileness and horror. Her chief associate was an unfrocked priest—the Satanists believed that only a priest could properly perform the mass—the Abbe Guibourg.

De La Reynie described this monster as follows: "He can be compared with no one else for the number of his poisonings and his traffic in poison and witchcraft. He is familiar with every form of villainy, guilty of a large number of horrible crimes and suspected of complicity in many others."

He was a hideous old man of seventy, bloated looking, his face mottled with bluish-reddish veins and blind in one eye. He claimed to be illegitimately descended from one of the great families of France. He had traveled widely and had a rare knowledge of human beings and their desires. He was the "spiritual" leader of La Voison's society, always at her service in crime. As a poisoner he was an artist, having concocted many subtle toxics of his own. His favorite was a strange distillation of buttercups and crowfoot. The person who drank it died in spasms of laughter. Another poison was so virulent that merely to tread on it in barefeet was enough to bring certain and horrible death.

Guibourg achieved his greatest power as an officiator at the Black Masses.

Women believed firmly that he could gain them the Devil's favor. The object of the Black Mass was to persuade the Prince of Darkness to grant some favor—the death of an enemy, the winning of some lover or a thousand other desires. In order to gain Satan's approval a ghastly, obscene ritual had been devised. The altar consisted of a woman's nude body, often the supplicant herself. She lay flat on her back with arms outstretched. In each hand she held a black candle made of human fat. Similar candles formed a circle around her, casting their eerie shadows over her glistening flesh.

Guibourg, clad in robes covered with cabalistic symbols and assisted by an acolyte, usually a nude girl, began the horrible ritual. So horrible was it that one woman literally died of fright before it was over.

The black scriptures were contained in a huge missal bound in human skin. The dark, vaulted chamber where the mass was celebrated was filled with foul-smelling incense, while foul water was sprinkled over the worshippers.

The ritual reached its climax in blood-letting. A naked infant would be brought forward. Guibourg would seize a long, sharp knife and draw it slowly over the infant's throat. The acolyte would quickly catch the streaming blood in a chalice and as the infant gasped its last would pour it over the human altar. At the same time other acolytes thrust the mutilated infant's body into a blazing furnace or buried it. Sometimes the entrails were ripped out and distilled, either to tell fortunes by as the old Romans did with the entrails of birds, or to titillate Satan's nostrils.

There was never any difficulty in obtaining these human sacrifices. La Voison knew just what to do with the unwanted babies that women brought her. And, in addition, there was a regular business throughout Paris between midwives and

unmarried mothers. When the demand exceeded the supply, these dealers in human flesh kidnaped children.

In 1676 a newspaper reported that "there were seditious gatherings and disturbances in several parts of the city, through the rumor that people were carrying off children to cut their throats, though no one then understood what the cause of the rumor could be. But the mob, made furious by it, proceeded to various excesses against the women who were suspected of being child-stealers."

What became of these children, however, La Voison and Guihourg knew perfectly well. The answer was the huge stove in La Voison's attic and the unmarked cemetery beneath her lawn where 2,500 children were eventually to be burned or buried.

Guibourg's reputation as a celebrant of the Black Mass spread throughout the city and he no longer confined his activities to La Voison's lair. He was led all over—always blindfolded so that he would not know upon whom he had performed the ritual—into sub-cellars, secret basements, hideaways of all sorts.

**OF ALL** his clients the strangest and most powerful was the beautiful Madame de Montespan, mistress of the King. The story of her relationship with the Abbe Guibourg and La Voison is so characteristic of the whole, horrible practice of black magic that it is worth chronicling here in full.

Francoise-Athenais de Montespan, as beautiful as sin and more evil than sin itself, daughter of an impoverished nobleman, had spent her life at court since she was twenty. Her early duties consisted of consoling the Queen while His Majesty dallied with his various mistresses. Eventually she married the Marquis de Montespan, bore him two children, one of which died, and slowly grew to hate her husband. Her secret desire was to become as

powerful as the King's current mistress, Louise de la Valliere, indeed, to succeed her.

To encompass the death of La Valliere she began visiting various magicians and witnesses. At first she went to a couple known as Lesage and Mariette. They ripped out the hearts of two pigeons and pronounced spells against La Valliere. The police got wind of these rites. Lesage and Mariette were jailed for sorcery. Later, when Madame de Montespan achieved the power she wanted, they were released and raised to high positions. But that was not to be for some time yet.

Not in the least frightened or discouraged Madame de Montespan next consulted La Voison and Guibourg. The latter started his incantations innocently enough with a ritual known as the Black Faggot. In the middle of a piece of wood he inserted incense and alum. The wood was then placed on a low fire and as it started to burn, Guibourg chanted: "Faggot, I burn thee, but it is the heart, the body, the soul, the blood, the mind, the spirit of Louise de la Valliere. By the earth, by the heavens, by the rainbow, by the twelve lines, by Mars, by Mercury and all the planets, may she be unable to rest in peace, to the very marrow of her bones. In the name of all the demons, depart, faggot, and consume the body, the soul, the power of action, the spirit, the mind of Louise de la Valliere, so that she may neither stand still, nor talk to any person, nor rest, nor mount a horse, nor cross a river, nor drink, nor eat, until the time when my desire and my will upon her be accomplished. Quanto, guio, garoco." Then just before the faggot broke and the incense and alum lit, salt and wine were poured thrice over the flames with the words, "Ourne tourne."

But this fantastic ritual failed to produce the desired results. And so Madame de Montespan agreed to take part in a Black Mass. Evidence adduced at the trial

of La Voison. Guibourg and the rest, has left a complete picture of what happened.

It was Lecroy, governor of the King's pages, who first approached Guibourg with the idea of working for Madame de Montespan. He promised him a huge sum of money for life.

Madame de Montespan refused at first to perform the function of living altar. This was done by another woman. Guibourg approached her nude body and intoned: "Astoroth, Asmodeus, Prince of Friendship, I pray you to accept the sacrifice, this child I offer you, for the things I ask of you . . . that the affection of the King and Monseigneur the Dauphin may be assured to Madame de Montespan, and that she may be honored by the princes and princesses of the court, and that nothing she may ask of the King may be denied to her, to her kinsfolk or to her servants."

The child was then brought in. Guibourg had purchased it from its mother for a few dollars. He produced his sacrificial knife, jerked the child's head back by its hair and slashed the blade across his throat. After the blood had been caught in the chalice, a second knife was produced. This Guibourg plunged into the child's belly, tearing out its heart and entrails. A second child was butchered in the same way and out of the blood, heart and entrails a powder was made. This love-philtre was given to Madame de Montespan.

Five or six masses were said in this way during the ensuing year and it happened that de la Valliere fell desperately ill. Her illness ravaged her beauty. She aged and faded. The King promptly abandoned her and Madame de Montespan took a firm grasp of his affections. Guibourg crowed that his charms had worked. From then on Madame de Montespan was entirely under his dominance.

She was to have much use for the Abbe and La Voison in the years to come.

The King showed a renewed interest in his wife, the Queen. Alarmed, Madame de Momespan sought Guibourg's help. This time she submitted her own nude body to the ritual of the Black Mass. As matters turned out, the King's brief renewal of interest in his wife died and for the next two years Madame de Montespan required no further assistance from La Voison and her hideous brood.

**I**N 1675, however, another crisis occurred. Louis had been associated with the de Montespan for six years and court rumors had it that he was growing heartily tired of her. Indeed, the Bishop of Meaux, probably nerved by the lady's fall from grace, refused her entrance into the church. The ladies and gentlemen of the court rose against her and she was temporarily driven into retirement.

She emerged presently and made straight away for the unholy shrine of the Abbe Guibourg. More infant blood was spilled, more obscene rites carried out in the dead of night with de Montespan serving as human alter. Again, witchcraft seems to have saved her, for the King unaccountably took her back. She enjoyed another year of favor. It was the last.

Louis now became amazingly fickle, taking and discarding four beauties of the court in swift succession. The arrival at court of the famous Madame de Maintenon delivered the death-blow to Montespan's hopes. From the moment Louis set eyes upon her he was deeply enamored.

Frantically she appealed to Guibourg. Now, all the vilest excesses of hell were launched in her behalf. Unspeakable orgies of Satanism and lust flamed in an effort to retain the favor of the Devil. At the same time La Voison formed a plot to murder Montespan's successor by means of a poisoned glove. Saturated in a deadly perfume it was guaranteed to bring death at the first whiff.

But before this scheme could be put in action de la Reynie, who had been quietly investigating her activities, arrested her. Momespan fled the court in time to save her own neck and was heard from no more.

With the arrest of La Voison the unspeakable scandal of Satanism, the intrigues, the poisoners and poisonings and all the rest of it, was dragged into blazing limelight. It created a sensation which has not yet been forgot and which indirectly led to the French Revolution. The King expressed the deepest shock and ordered his police commissioner to delve down to the bottom of the affair.

For this purpose was established the terrible *Chambre Ardente* or torture chamber where all those connected with the satanists were taken and submitted to unbearable agonies. Among them, of course, was La Voison herself.

She was taken into the *Chambre Ardente* and handed over to the tender mercies of the official torturer. He placed her upon a stool and thrust her body into the "buskin", a form of close-fitting leather jerkin which is slowly tightened by inserting wooden wedges, thus squeezing the breath from the prisoner.

De La Reynie, who observed the entire scene with considerable pleasure has left this account of it: "She was bound and warned to tell the truth and to say nothing of the names of accomplices or of acts upon which she had been questioned but what was the truth. After which, M. Vesou, doctor, and Morel, master surgeon, were admitted to the room."

She was first questioned about certain lady clients who desired to procure the deaths of their husbands. De La Reynie's account continues:

"She said she had never been to Saint-Germain, had never taken powders there nor known Mlle. Desoeillets, nor had dealings with her. She had said all she knew about the Comtesse de Soissons and had

nothing to add to it, nor about Mme. d'Alluye, having nothing to add to that either.

"Urged to tell the truth. . . She had told it. At the first wedge she had nothing more to say, she had told the truth, as witness God.

"She knew nothing and had taken nothing to Saint-Germain, neither powders nor anything else. . . At the second wedge she cried, 'Ah, God. Ah, Holy Virgin!' but said nothing more.

"At the third wedge she cried more loudly and pleaded for pity. She had told the truth; she had never taken any powders to Saint-Germain and knew nothing more about the ladies de Soissons and d'Alluye than what she had already said.

"At the fourth wedge she cried tremendously, but said nothing."

**T**HIS iron-willed woman bore the most horrible of tortures while four more wedges tightened the buskin around her. Then and only then she broke, admitting that "she felt obliged, in order to ease her conscience, that a large number of

persons of all ranks and conditions had applied to her for the death of, or the means of doing away with many persons, and that debauchery was the chief incentive of these disorders."

And with that she was dragged out to the Place de Greve, public scaffold, placed upon a pile of faggots and slowly roasted to death. Before the end came she had screamed out enough to make it possible to proceed against other members of her vile society.

As a result of these dying statements, other lesser societies of Satanists were exposed and dully smashed. There was the Abbe Bouchot who debauched and murdered whole armies of women in the worship of the Devil.

With the exception of Guibourg, the Abbe Lemignan was the worst of the lot. This grizzled, huge, old man had an obsession. That obsession was buried treasure. As a result of the recent wars of the Fronde, a species of civil wars, many noble families had buried their plate, silver, gold and jewels in secret caches, usually underground. But often, it hap-

Statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of March 3, 1933, of Terror Tales, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1938, State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Terror Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statement embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 10th day of October, 1938. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 20, Register's No. O.W-49. (My commission expires March 30, 1940.) [Seal].—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.



pened, these families were either killed or exiled. Only the hidden treasure remained.

A frantic scramble started to recover these various treasures. But who could tell where to look? The Devil, whispered the Satanists. And so his Mephistophelian Majesty was enlisted once more to locate secret fortunes. Another bloody, obscene ritual was devised and more or less standardized. The celebrant would perform over the suspected cache and exhort Satan to indicate the exact location of the treasure. Often a woman about to deliver a child would be used in the ritual. She would be placed in a circle of flickering candles. When the child was born, it would either be battered to death before her eyes as a sacrifice to Satan, or taken elsewhere and murdered in secret.

Chief among the practitioners of treasure-hunting by witchcraft was Lemignan. La Joly, one of La Voison's crew, once visited him in his lodgings, accompanied by a poisoner called Meline. She later told the inquisitioners of the *Chambre Ardente*:

"Lemignan at once raised a piece of evil tapestry and showed behind it an earthenware basin, and in the basin were

the bodies of two baby boys about seven months old. They had been cut into several pieces, which were in the basin, and the blood was very red and fresh. Meline touched the two bodies, and, finding them warm, asked whether they had been alive when sacrificed; to which he answered that he had nothing to say to that, but he and Meline would do something even better."

Lemignan, however, defended himself so eloquently before the *Chambre Ardente* that he got off with a light eight-year sentence of exile.

Not so the Abbe Mariette, who paid with his life for a career of vileness and horror. Mariette came of excellent family. He started off early by poisoning a brother. He next lent himself to the celebration of Black Masses and for this was banished from Paris. He soon returned, however, and swore allegiance to the black banner of La Voison. His first assignment was to cause the liquidation of one Madame Lefron's husband. This he accomplished by arming the woman with a subtle mixture of arsenic and powdered toad's skull, and the wretched husband duly died in agonizing convulsions.

He next hired himself out to the Com-



tesse de Polignac, another lady of the Court, ambitious to become Louis' mistress. Indeed, a large percentage of the business of La Voison's disciples came from these venal women. Mariette celebrated a Black Mass on the naked body of a servant girl, slaughtering two children in the process. The de Polignac did not realize her ambitions, but Mariette netted some \$100,000.

Mariette was likewise involved in the affairs of the de Montespan, and when that titanic plot crashed he fled immediately to Bordeaux where he was protected by a former client, the Vicomte de Cousserans. Six months later de la Reynie's agents ferretted him out and dragged him back to Paris. He escaped the stake, but the torture was more than he could stand and he died in prison, shrieking for Satan to come to his aid.

**A**MONG the Satanists who dealt mostly in poisons the Abbe Dubousquet and a trunk-maker called Gerard were supreme. They devised this cunning method of giving death: They would smear a compound of soft soap and arsenic inside the toe of a boot and leave a nail slightly exposed. Thus, the wearer would prick his foot and the poison would enter his blood. Death was slow, excruciatingly painful and certain.

Other master poisoners of La Voison's band were Dulong, Godin de Sainte-Croix and Lemperier, while the following perfected themselves in certain Satanic specialties: Cotton celebrated Black Masses on obscene wax figurines designed to obtain love or death as desired by the client; Lepreux dealt exclusively in consecrating venomous snakes for foul Black Mass uses; Tournet and Lemour said Black Masses over the naked bodies of female lechers to ward off the consequences of their lechery; Malescot, Seysoon and Gabriel did a thriving business in still-born babies and cauls to be used

in the concoction of love-powders and poisons.

Author Johnson has epitomized this entire vile crew in the following revealing passage: "Since practically all the priests and midwives whom we have had occasion to mention were directly or indirectly known to La Voison and carried out at least some of their abominations in her attic with the big stove, we are now able to pass a sounder judgment upon the house in the Rue Beauregard and upon its principal tenant. No lewder or fouler house can have existed in Paris at that time or since, a house which—*pace* its present owners—might well be wholly demolished, its stones destroyed and its timbers burned, to obliterate it utterly from the sight of man. But if fine shades of distinction may be drawn between men and women all utterly vile, its most terrifying occupant was not La Voison herself; though she was ready to go to any length in order to obtain the wealth and public consideration she craved, she does not appear to have been naturally loathsome, as Guibourg, for instance, was loathsome. Her part was rather to direct crime and perversion to an even completer expression of themselves, to incite waverers and to animate enthusiasts, to employ her many and influential social contacts in winning new converts to infamy, and in bringing cowards, fools and rogues into the capacious net spread for their destruction by the devineresses, witches, midwives and pestilential priests. Such a task fell to her not by organization but by natural aptitude; she was a woman of exceptionally forceful character and of acute, though erratic, intelligence, who dominated her allies in evil as she was able to dominate some of the most famous men and women in France. It is the intensity with which she subjugated her life to business instincts—her absolute callousness in short—which stabs us even now more sharply than it did when we

knew her less; she was the exploiter of every sort of vileness. Were it not for a certain vague sincerity which distinguishes her from most of her associates, this exploitation would rank her in nauseating depravity even below Guibourg; without the least wish to condone a single one of her actions, may it not be admitted that her sincerity, even in superstition and evil, does lift her to the position of being worthier of our regard than most of the human beasts whose company she affected?"

As the reader considers this appalling chronicle of madness and murder, lust and evil, he doubtless congratulates himself on living in the twentieth century, telling himself—such things can't happen any more. In that, he is wrong. Fantastic as it may seem, black magic and kindred forms of orgiastic rites are practiced today, if not as widely as three centuries ago, at least as intensely.

By his own admission and evidence adduced during an English trial, the sinister man known as Alistair Crowley, calling himself variously "Beast 666" and "Baphomet XI, Supreme and Holy King of Ireland and High Priest of the Thelemites", has widely practiced black magic in its most obscene form. When Crowley in 1934 brought a suit against author Nina Hammett for revealing his practices in her book, "Laughing Torso," the jury

was so revolted by the evidence that the case was brought to a halt.

They found in favor of the defendant, upholding her statements that Crowley practiced black magic. Justice Swift declared: "Never have I heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous, abominable stuff as that produced by this man Crowley."

Most of the evidence at the trial was unprintable, especially that dealing with the life that Crowley's disciples led in the Temple of Theleme at Cefalu, a Sicilian village. According to witnesses, the utter abandon that prevailed at the temple was under the guise of cultish devotion. The creed of the weird cult was:

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law!"

One room in the Temple was described as "the cauchemar", or "nightmare room", which was adorned with indescribably lewd pictures and into which novitiates of the cult were taken to be "initiated".

The doctrine of the Thelemite Cult was that of yielding to impulse and urge—a doctrine of licentiousness and immorality, the Court was informed.

Crowley had previously been kicked out of New York when he conducted similar rites in his *Ordo Templi Oriente*.

So, you see, the impulses which motivated such Satanists as the Abbe Guibourg and La Voison are not yet dead.



TRADE

# NO JOKE



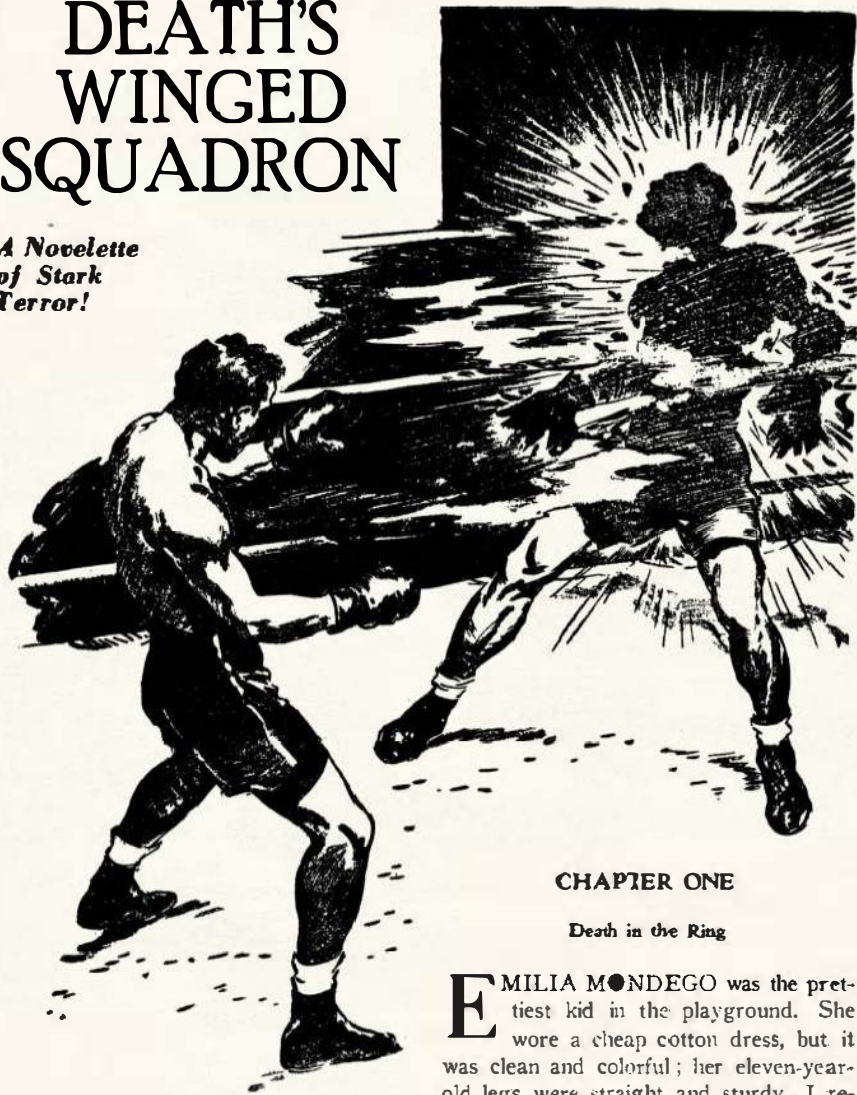
MARK

A cough due to a cold is no joke. Get Smith Brothers Cough Drops. (Black or Menthol.) Cost only 5¢—yet they're a real cough medicine.

**Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMINA**  
This is the vitamin that raises the resistance of the mucous membranes of the nose and throat to cold infections.

# DEATH'S WINGED SQUADRON

*A Novelette  
of Stark  
Terror!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Death in the Ring*

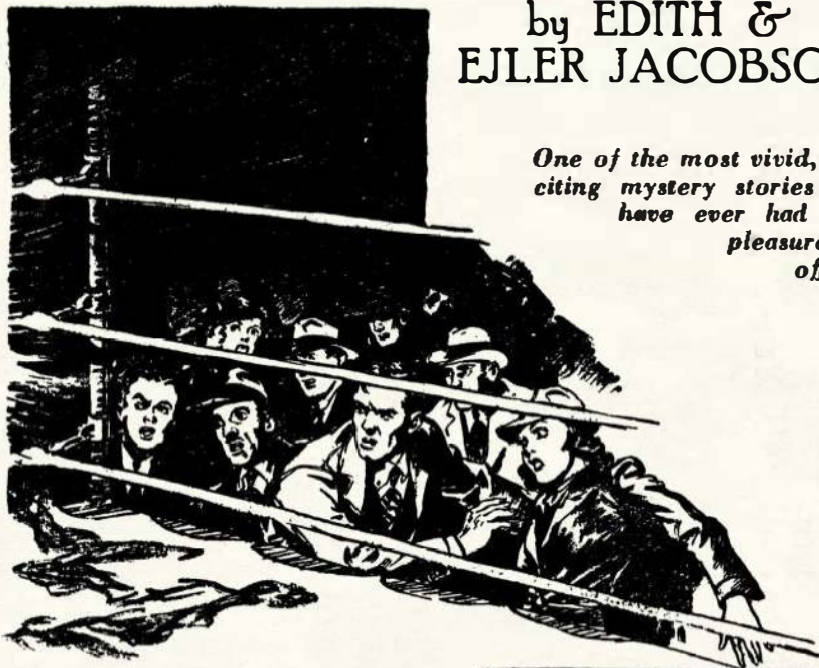
*Each time one of those blurred streaks of light whipped across my vision, horrible, blasting destruction followed; men and women lay bleeding, begging for death. . . . And each time, I thought I saw in that weird flash, the face of an angry little child—one of my own playground wards!*

**E**MILIA MONDEGO was the prettiest kid in the playground. She wore a cheap cotton dress, but it was clean and colorful; her eleven-year-old legs were straight and sturdy. I remember thinking, that morning at the playground as I stood talking to Erica Johnson and Emilia's big brother, Young, that I'd like to have a daughter of my own like Emilia.

Young Moudego noticed that I was looking at her, and it seemed to make him glow. He was a nice boy, twenty, with a clean heavyweight's body, and a good mind. I'd only met him that morning, but I was giving him credit for a lot. For giv-

by EDITH &  
EJLER JACOBSON

*One of the most vivid, exciting mystery stories we have ever had the pleasure to offer!*



ing more to a little sister than most twenty-year-olds do . . . for making her a swell little champ.

Suddenly Emilia broke away from the group of children she captained, hurtled toward the three of us with something dark and restive struggling in her small face. She came at Young Mondego like a bullet and she pummeled her fists against his stomach, and cried out, "I hate you! I hate you!"

I don't think those fists hurt much, but Young looked as though he'd been kayoed. Erica Johnson, playground director for the Breet Wyatt Foundation for Underprivileged Children, got a queer look of fright in her eyes as she knelt to quiet Emilia. While I looked at Erica and wished she'd give up the job.

That summer morning was my day for meeting the whole Mondego family. I'd known Emilia for months, ever since I'd started hanging around the playground, teaching the kids to make model airplanes; but I hadn't known her big brother, or her mother, who needed an operation. Up



to that minute, I'd had the kindest opinion in the world of the Mondegos. Emilia's sudden declaration left me not knowing what to think.

"It's not his fault, or the child's, either," Erica whispered to me, as a subdued but sudden Emilia went to rejoin her playmates. "Maybe it's that old mother. She may have made 'Milia a little crazy, too. It'll be so much better for all of them when Mrs. Mondego has that operation!"

A cerebral operation. Erica, with her customary zeal in arranging things for people who couldn't arrange for them-

selves, had induced a specialist to perform the operation for fifty dollars. And the fifty dollars was to be earned that night by Young Mondego, if he won his bout with Jack West at St. Christopher's Arena.

That's where I came in. I had a way of coming in whenever Erica concerned herself about things—you guessed it, I couldn't stay away from her. She was blonde and straight as a Valkyrie; to the Second Avenue families she worked with, she must have looked as much like an angel as she did to me.

My finger in that pie was the Gil Varney Air School of the Air. If you've heard my weekly broadcast you know that about once every two months I use the hour to boost some young American who seems to rate it. That night, I was going to broadcast Young Mondego's bout. It was a little off my regular line, which happens to be flying, but I'd go farther off than that for Erica.

It was for Erica that I'd brought the kids model planes from my up-and-coming shack of a factory in Jersey. It was for Erica that I began to feel a strange dread that morning, in a playground where children seemed to go suddenly sullen and berserk.

Because Emilia wasn't the first. There'd been a boy last week—incorrigible, they called him. He'd made an attempt at tearing Erica's eyes out, but she was twice his size, and able to hold him till help came.

Was it environment? Or heredity? Most of the kids loved Erica—the others seemed not to know the meaning of love. If she'd only give up this job, I thought, I'd take care of her. . . .

**I** WAS thinking of a lot of things the night of the West-Mondego fight, but none of them happened to be death. That was true also of a thousand-odd watchers in the darkened stadium, and of a possible

hundred thousand listeners who were getting the bruise-fest, blow by blow, over the Gil Varney air show.

I was thinking, I remember, that Jack West was an old burn, and that Young Mondego was an athlete. I was glad I'd done that favor for Erica—glad in a lot of ways. I'd started out, only meaning to boost an earnest lad for his mother's sake, and there I was getting into a lather over the two-bit scrap.

By the third round I knew I had a find. The Mondego kid was a comer, if I'd ever seen one. I'd seen the champ a week before, and Mondego looked just as good to me! I told Erica that, and she got quiet and glowing, couldn't say anything but that his mother would be so glad, so awfully glad. . . . I saw Rafe Oshinsky beaming at the ringside, and I knew I was giving Rafe a break he didn't deserve, raving about this bout he'd arranged, when he was only giving the kid fifty dollars. I was talking fast, I couldn't think of enough good things to say into the mike about the strong fast kid who was making that two-bit ring look like a million. . . .

And then I stopped talking. Out of the blank darkness, something like a meteor came into the ring. Something that landed in a flare of light, so swiftly that there was only a split-second in which I saw it at all. Yet, in that split-second, I could have sworn to a glimpse of a tiny face—a face that was like Emilia Mondego's, that morning, when she'd hurtled into her brother!

The crash was deafening, and it died into the sounds of a screaming, stampeding mob. Somebody had turned on all the lights—somewhere police whistles were shrilling incessantly.

In the ring—well, I tried to pull Erica's face to my chest, yelled at her, "Don't look!" But she'd seen it already.

Jack West was leaning against the ropes in a neutral corner, and the ring was full

of blood. Young Mondego's blood. What was left of Mondego, wasn't enough to bury. He looked as though he'd been stuffed with dynamite and ignited.

It had happened in seconds, or less than seconds. And as far as I know, it was the work of a small angel of death who had screamed that morning, "I hate you!" at a boy who was now dead. A small angel who had caromed out of darkness, and of whom there was now no trace.

Erica was white as a dead woman. She kept staring into that ring, murmuring, "But it couldn't have been Emilia's face! Unless Emilia's a ghost. Gil, it wasn't time for him to die. . . ."

What would you have said? I said it. Nothing at all. I didn't feel so good myself. There's nothing I admire more than a superb athlete, and I'd seen a perfectly splendid athlete destroyed by something more than a bolt from heaven. I kept telling myself that I couldn't have seen that innocent angry face . . . and yet, when I shut my eyes, I could see it again. And I couldn't get Erica out of the press box. Not right away, not into that crazy mob that expected the whole Arena to blow up any minute. . . .

We couldn't go until Rafe Oshinsky, with a police escort of ten, shouldered his way into the press box. He grabbed Erica's arm, and a policeman grabbed mine, and they led us to safety.

Rafe Oshinsky's money-loving soul made his beef-face a tormented chart. "Hell, Mr. Varney," he said. "I'm sorry! You saw how good he was, Mr. Varney—and right when you were giving us such a break!"

Plenty tough on Oshinsky, I didn't think. He'd been on the verge of a break for his penny-show, and he hadn't gotten it. He was heart-broken over that, and Young Mondego was dead, but that was only incidental. I turned down Rafe's offer of a drink; I didn't want any more

of his lamentation and apology. There was something else in me, something that turned my stomach cold in recurrent waves whenever I thought of it. . . . Something that made me pull Erica into a taxi, and take her down to the Second Avenue flat where the Mondegos lived.

I'M no hero, and I know it. But to a few thousand kids in New York City, I'm the pilot who brings in the New Year. That's my stock-in-trade on the Air School of the Air. I go eastward out to sea, before the dawn of every January First, and then fly westward with the sun. I know the kids love it, because I've read the letters they send me.

Yet that night, as I drove downtown with Erica, I thought of children like a bad man thinks of the devil. It kept ticking in my brain, that one fantastic but inevitable conclusion—that Emilia had declared passionate hatred for Young a few hours before he died; that I'd seen Emilia's face in the murder-flare. I thought of that other boy, too. The one who'd done amok in the playground a week ago, trying to tear out Erica's eyes.

Fantastic? It had to be fantastic. We would find Emilia in bed at her mother's house, I told myself, and she would cry when she heard her brother was dead. Hate doesn't last in children; it can't, certainly, project itself as a spiritual animus into a physical act like murder. . . .

Nevertheless, I asked Erica: "Tommy McCarthy—remember him? You had to call the cops for him last week. Whatever become of him?"

Erica's lips were still a pale bloodless purple. She moistened them briefly, and said, "I'm not sure, Gil. He hasn't been around since then. I think they had to send him to reform school."

That's reasonable, you fool. I told myself—and at the same time, I had an inner vision of Tommy McCarthy hating Erica with every atom of energy in his soul. . . .

hating her unto death . . . projecting his hatred from some powerful and invisible point where it could wreak damage.

Once you start thinking that way, you can think anything. I even remembered a set-to I'd had myself, one morning late that summer in the playground, when a child had answered my instructions about a model airplane with a startling baleful sneer. . . . "I didn't see Stanley Polchek this morning, Erica. Hasn't he been coming around any more?"

The wide blue eyes, with serenity dashed out of them, turned to me. "No, Gil, not lately. I—have quite a turnover, of course. The children come voluntarily, and there's no constraint on them to keep coming." She paused, trying to hold on to herself, and didn't quite manage. Her hand found mine, and she moaned. "Oh, Gil, Gil . . . he was such a decent boy! And—what a horrible way to die!"

She was terribly upset about Young Mondego and maybe something else. In the darkness I couldn't tell. I was frantic with a crazy, unreasonable fear for someone who was still alive. Someone who leaned against my shoulder in the cab, turning to me in her shock and grief.

A thought occurred to me. "Did the Mondegos have a radio?" I asked.

Erica said, "Oh, no. They couldn't afford anything like that."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Arena of Slave Kids

SOMEHOW, as we stumbled up the badly-lit wood staircase, I knew I wouldn't find reassurance in the Mondego apartment. I knew it even more strongly when I saw the woman who opened the door. There was a desperate queerness about her—and she couldn't have heard about her son. Something else must have hit her hard.

Her skin was dry, and the cracks in

her face didn't leave room for a smile or a frown. She had white hair, sparse and startling against the sere brown skin. Not many teeth were left in her head, and those that were had started to rot. But worst of all were the eyes. Once they may have been brown; now they had faded to yellow that glistened and shifted like a sick cat's eyes.

They glistened especially at the sight of Erica. A bony claw reached out, and a quavering voice said too eagerly, "You come in, Miss Johnson! You come right in!"

I'm not afraid of tailspin trouble—but I was afraid that night when I crossed the threshold of a poor old woman's house. Afraid for Erica. . . .

We both exclaimed as we came into the first of the two closets that passed for rooms. Standing there, with a worried frown on his handsome young face, his clothes making him look like a polished diamond in a lead setting, was Brett Wyatt, Erica's millionaire employer.

Momentarily, I wondered what in the name of heaven Brett was doing in a squalid slum like this, and why he looked so worried. A shuffling behind me made me turn around fast, and then I knew at least why Brett was staying, if not why he had come.

The old Mondego woman faced us all, with a rusty revolver wavering at us. "In three minutes," she cackled, "you're all going to die!"

Erica gasped and went pale, but she stood straight and still. Then, gently as a mother trying to lift a child off a roof-ledge without startling it, she walked toward the old woman. "You've had a hard time, Mrs. Mondego," she said quietly, fixing her steady blue eyes on the shifting yellow ones.

The old woman was staring straight at me. "Who's that?" she asked.

Erica's voice was cool as an Arctic seal. "Mr. Gil Varney, Mrs. Mondego."



The old woman laughed—and her laughter was terrible to hear. "Gil Varney! The New Year's Pilot? Milia's told me about you. Well, there won't be any more new years for you, Mr. Gil Varney—" Her finger crooked shakily on the trigger.

"You don't understand," I said. "We came here to ask about your little girl."

That was the wrong thing to say. The old woman flared up. "That's what he said, too," she snorted, jerking a thumb at Brett. "As though he didn't know already what's happened to Emilia!"

"What *has* happened?" Erica asked. Somehow, looking at that rusty old cannon held by a quivering madwoman, I didn't understand how our lives were being prolonged, second by second.

"Milia's dead!" the old woman suddenly cried. "You know that! But you don't know—that she's an angel. She sees you now, and she wants you to die . . . she wants to strike you down."

I saw it coming then, before I had time to think. The shaking revolver had steadied at last, and it was pointed not at Brett, not at Erica, but at me. Instinctively, I dove for the old woman's knees. There was sharp report, and a body slumped over me. Blood smeared me, got in my eyes. . . .

Erica screamed. For a second, I thought I'd been hit—and then I got to my feet, and found it wasn't my blood that covered me.

It was the old woman's. She'd been shot in the throat.

Brett stood there, white as chalk, with a steel-blue pistol in his hand. He whispered, in an awed, ghastly way, "I killed her."

**E**ERICA and I pleaded with him, and after the police heard us testify for two hours that it was self-defence, they offered to rout a judge out of bed, and have him set bail for Brett. But Brett's ears

seemed still full of the sound of death, and you could tell by looking at his white face that he was more aware of old Mrs. Mondego with her throat shot out than he was of Erica and me, two feet in front of him, pleading.

He looked at his strong brown hands, as though he could see blood on them. In the end, chiefly through his own insistence, he was taken into custody. I knew how he felt—it doesn't set well on a normal man's stomach to kill an old woman, even if his hand is forced.

"I may be more of a criminal than you think," he said hopelessly to us and to the police. "God knows, I didn't mean to be—I just wanted the Foundation to go on, and so I didn't risk scaring off the kids by an investigation."

Then he told us something that I guessed, by looking at her face, Erica already knew. Emilia Mondego had been at least the eighth child to disappear on her way home from the playground in the last two months. And because children do disappear in slums, Brett hadn't considered it altogether his business, until tonight. Emilia Mondego's case was the climax that made it no coincidence—Brett had gone down to see the mother personally, as the prelude to further investigation.

"She wasn't sane," he said. "She threatened me; she wouldn't listen to reason." He looked to Erica, and I thought I saw a warmth coming into his eyes in response to her concern. I thought, too, that there was more than concern in her face—there was a certain admiration. That hurt. "And then you came," he finished.

I hadn't any right to be hurt, or jealous. I knew it. Brett had just saved my life, and he was paying for it without complaining. Before they took him away, he spoke to me privately for a moment. "I know how you feel about Erica," he said. "And I know you'll do your best. But I feel that way too—so I'm putting in my two cents. I don't know what's happening.

but something is. Don't let her out of your sight."

I felt rotten and low, sitting behind Brett's chauffeur next to Erica, while Brett's big car took us away from the station. Partly I was worried, wishing that Brett had stayed out of the jug to help me look after Erica. Partly, I felt that the play had been taken away from me. I couldn't see Erica's face in the darkness, and she didn't say anything, but I knew she was thinking. I guessed she wasn't thinking of me. I didn't want to be jealous of Brett, who was richer, kinder, and that night had shown himself more of a man, than I. I tried to think of other things. . . . That wasn't hard, because plenty of other things had been happening.

The police hadn't put much stock in our story of a little murderous angel striking in a flare of light. They were investigating Young Mondego's death from a more realistic angle. Either someone had placed a big bet on the picayune fight, which wasn't likely, or else Mondego's promise as a fighter had inspired some scared backer of a more prominent boxer to put him out of the way.

It might be that the crazed old mother wouldn't have reported anything straight, not even a threat, which might have explained Emilia's disappearance.

Momentarily, as we passed through midtown Manhattan, I wondered if Brett knew more than we did, or if he had surmised Erica's danger as I had.

And then I stopped wondering about anything. There was only one thing in me—fear. It wasn't a thing to frighten a grown man, ordinarily—it was only the face of a child, loitering in front of Erica's apartment hotel, his big eyes fixed on us with a peculiar hostile gravity, as though he'd been waiting for us a long time. . . .

**I** LEAPED from the limousine before it came to a full stop and gave chase, because the kid was Tommy McCarthy.

At the corner, I had to stop, because there were a hundred shapes, and a hundred arcways and infinite shadow making any kind of reasonable pursuit impossible. Erica came up behind me and clutched my arm. The wide blue eyes had terror in them. She said the child's name and there were tears in her voice. . . .

I found an officer on the beat, told him I'd spotted a child who was reported missing. He twirled his stick, jotted down a description, and said casually, "Don't worry too much, if he's not your kid. Either they turn up in a few days—or else they become chronic runaways, and there's no keeping them back."

Chronic runaway? Or an instrument of diabolic hate, loose near Erica's home? . . . I could see Emilia Mondego again, without even shutting my eyes. I could see her pummeling a boy who was going to lie in his own life-blood twelve hours later.

"Gil, what's happening to us?" God, if I could have answered that in time to prevent what followed!

I took Erica's arm, and walked back to the hotel with her. It didn't matter where I slept. On a couch, a chair, or on the floor—but I swore nothing was going to move me out of Erica's lobby that night.

They made me sign for a room, and pay for it. I thought that was an easy enough way of getting what I wanted, which was to park in that lobby till Erica came down for breakfast. She said nothing, but there was a look of relief on her face when I took her to the elevator.

"You're being a good friend, Gil," she said. The fair skin was pale, almost bloodless—I couldn't have expected her to look otherwise, but it worried me. . . . Her hand was cool in mine for a second, and then she went up. There was no attempt at a good-night kiss—and yet she'd given me that much, often. So many things on her mind, I told myself—and then the thought intruded: is Brett Wyatt one of them?

I had to forget that, I had to. I found a deep-cushioned chair in the nostalgically ornate old hotel lobby, and slumped into it. A desk-clerk looked at me, and then relaxed into uneven sleep. Not a bad sort of hotel—clean and respectable, but with its best days behind it. I could do so much better for Erica, I thought, I could give her a home—and she could give me one—

Wings! Suddenly my relaxed body poised itself in the semi-darkness, at the sudden familiar sound of air playing on struts—a bright shadow swooped by the hotel entrance, like a stranger uncertain of his destination, and then I was on my feet. I knew it would come back—and in the door.

Lightning is no swifter than the arm of death—and yet some undreamt-of agility in my make-up was swifter. It must have been, for I hurled a small wooden table at the swooping roaring shadow before I realized it. The night's silence shattered into thunder, and for a brief second, the dim lobby was brilliant with destructive light.

I felt myself slammed against a wall, and a stunning jar of pain seemed to rip the right leg from my body. . . .

Then darkness again, and pain, and men screaming in the night for light.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Who's the Boss of Hell?

THE lights were up almost instantly—on a scene of carnage. The neat old-fashioned lobby was in splinters and shreds, and the dozing desk-clerk had awakened to nightmare more real than dream. Across his desk he sprawled, clawing futilely at a jagged crimson thing that had been his belly. An elevator man with his eye oozing blood, was running vainly as a madman from the pain he carried within him.

People poured into the hall, horrified people who shouted loud questions even as they rushed to aid the dying—of whom I might be one. I didn't wait to find out. My legs would carry me, and that was enough—I found a staircase, and went up it on all fours, my heart beating in terror for Erica.

The thing had struck again. On the third floor landing, sheer paralysis stopped me, and I clutched that wounded leg with an oath.

A thin brownish stream of blood clotted on my right trouser-leg. I cut a clinging patch of cloth with a pocket-knife, and examined the wound. Only then did I know that something had become imbedded in the flesh of my thigh.

Did it hurt? It must have, but I didn't know it then. Fear and rage are sometimes anaesthetics. I cut the paralyzing small object from my leg with that knife-blade, and wiped the blood off it, on my shirt.

There it lay, in my palm, so obvious that unless I were stark mad I had to recognize it.

The cylinder-head of a tiny gasoline engine. Extremely familiar, both as to shape and as to the small GV stamped on its smooth end. The thing had come from my own factory in New Jersey. If I had found as definite evidence linking the horror with another man, I'd have killed him.

I could only pray that Erica would be safe. But the fact that there were people downstairs seemed to guarantee that, as well as my continued presence would have done.

People below . . . looking for traces of the bomb-like thing which had destroyed itself in the very act of destruction. They were going to find more cylinder-heads . . . other parts. I knew that other people were going to draw a damning conclusion from that proud and innocent manufacturer's monogram. Only two people to take

care of Erica. And Brett was already incapable of moving to help her. I couldn't let myself be detained, too.

I crawled somehow across the third floor, to a back staircase. There were three chances in a thousand that I wouldn't be found there, but I prayed for those three chances like I'd never prayed before. Pain wasn't making me wince, but it made me half-blind, it made me stop and start again a hundred times. What I needed was a drink, but I didn't know how I'd get one.

Luck, or Providence, was with me for the next fifteen minutes. I could hardly believe it when I found myself at the back entrance, staggering into Forty-eighth Street, with the stars over me. My mind was ticking furiously, and my body was all for letting me down, but I got to a cab on the corner.

The driver eyed me curiously and he eyed my ten-dollar bill with satisfaction. "Where to?" he asked. "Not Hoboken?"

"No," I gasped. "Just take me to—the St. Christopher Arena." Why had I said that? Until I thought about it, I hardly knew, myself. It was a destination my instincts had devolved on while my conscious mind was busy with only fear and pain.

**I** SAT back, and tried to re-visualize a scene which had occurred so quickly that there was time to observe it only through the camera eye of memory. That moment of carnage in a hotel lobby when a bright flash of doom struck a hurtling piece of furniture. . . .

I knew no one had been directly hit by the death instrument. What it had hit, what had projected the explosion, was the table I threw at it. In that respect, it differed from the clash in which Young Mondago had died. And yet—desperately I tried to re-see something, the first sight of which had half-blinded me—hadn't there been a spattering of blood in that mo-

ment of impact itself, before the other wounded were struck? Hadn't the bright shadow sprayed a living fountain? . . .

That was it. An almost invisible projectile, so devised that it held airplane parts of my make. Airplanes could be camouflaged to merge with dusky atmosphere . . . and there must have been a living pilot who died at the peak of his work. I knew there was no product of my factory which could have exhibited those hellish qualities, but it was part of my business to make parts for various model plane builders, jobbers who sold to amateurs; any number of people. Those parts could have been distributed to some fiendish artisan through any one of a hundred channels. . . .

*A living pilot.* The words echoed through my brain with a sickening resonance. I saw that spattering blood-fountain again . . . and thought of the face in the first explosion, the face of Emilia Mondego.

It was I who had taught those playground children, in all good faith, to play with model planes—I who had talked with them for hours about aeronautics; I who had waived any suggestion that it wasn't a fit subject for little girls, and pointed with pride to one of my brightest pupils, eleven-year-old Emilia Mondego. . . .

But why, even if some evil intellect had distorted my activities into this devil-pattern of death and hatred, were all those distortions coming home to me? Why had the first prize-fight I ever broadcast been interrupted by the first manifestation of those satanic bombings? Why—for I was sure now that it was I against whom that attack in the hotel lobby had been directed—had I been slated for death that night?

It wasn't concern for my own health that made me wonder. It was the hope of finding in the answer to my questions some clue to the whole black system, and some proof of the guilt of the fiendish intelligence behind tonight's happenings.

An answer flashed across my brain—an answer as fantastic as the hellish set-up itself. But there was a certain relief in my heart at the thought, for if I were right, I knew that Erica at least would be safe.

I paid the cabbie off three blocks away from St. Christopher's Arena. It wasn't comfortable, walking those streets. My leg was going to take more than a fifteen minute rest to get back to normal, but I wanted to arrive without notice or welcome. Somehow, I suspected that either would have been unpleasant, and from what I had experienced. I knew I was dealing with forces whose concept of hellishness was devastating.

It was one in the morning. Like a brooding ghost, old St. Christopher's loomed over the quieting Broadway. A boy had died there during the night, but there was no hint of it at the locked gate, and no one had remembered to take down a poster that announced a bout between Jack West and Young Mondego. . . .

But inside there would be a wrecked ring and blood-stains waiting for the scrub woman's morning visit. There would be, perhaps, a twin cylinder-head to the one I'd taken from my leg . . . or other things. Just as one broken part had pointed mutely to me, another might point more surely at another maker. . . .

I couldn't risk detection at those steel gates. There was another way in, through the narrow prison-like window on the second floor, a window that must have seemed hardly worth bolting. I was no second-story man, and I had a game leg, and my insides ached with weariness and shock and fear . . . but I was going to get through that window. Rough-hewn stones formed the outer architecture of the building, and on them I found a precarious foothold upward.

One last pull, with my arms shrieking for respite—and then I catapulted into a dark interior, on all fours. The thud of my landing echoed dully, vastly—I knew I

was in the amphitheatre itself. A minute's rest—I had to allow myself that—and then I crept down through row after row of empty seats, toward the ring. My heart kept knocking a rapid warning against its cage, I was sick and scared and half-dizzy. I was alone in a dark big place, and I felt no better about it than men usually do. It seemed, even as I went forward to examine the foot-prints of death, the sound of death was behind me. More than once I turned about suddenly at the echo of my own breathing, expecting to see the shadow of a murder-bird swooping down on me as it had swooped on Young Mondego in this place.

If that had happened, I couldn't have saved myself. There wasn't that much strength in me . . . but there was going to be. I didn't know it, but there are reserves in a man that he may tap once in a lifetime or not at all. I was going to use that reserve. . . . I think I started using it when voices disturbed the big darkness, thinly and unevenly, the minute I got into the ring.

I STOOD there, waiting for something to hit me, and not daring to strike a match. But nothing came, and the voices persisted. The sound was too faint to determine anything except that other human beings were in St. Christopher's Arena, and I knew that no one had any business there at that hour.

A yell. Swift and staccato, its echo lingered in the dark seconds after the sound died. And even in the echo there was a quality of murderousness that made me tremble to think a human throat had uttered it. Not passion, not fright—but intense, unadulterated hate. Yells like that may have damned the air, in the meeting of barbaric armies, or during a midnight lynching . . . but they don't belong in an empty building in the heart of New York.

Something made me bolt out of the

ring, down an aisle, and into a training-room corridor. Something that remembered the wrecked beauty of a young athlete's body, and the terrific anticipation in a girl's blue eyes. That something was rage.

The voices grew louder as I trailed them, took on color and meaning. *Children's* voices . . . with the child-like verve hideously distorted. Quarrelsome, rebellious, the tones rose and fell in angry gusto. And as I came nearer the source, I heard an occasional treble oath. There was a sharp crack, too brittle to be a revolver—and then that yell again.

It came from behind a wall directly to my right. I groped for a door-knob, and then there was no more darkness.

Rafe Oshinsky whirled to meet me at the door. There was a bull-whip in his big paw, and he tried to drive me out with it, but I wasn't being driven, not that night. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of children, dozens of them, with red welts on their little bodies. . . . I went for the man with the whip, tooth and nail.

The whip caught me across the chest, slicing through coat and shirt and flesh, but it was taking more than that to stop me. I knocked him down, my fists staining his teeth crimson, pulping his nose. . . .

Suddenly I realized that I was being dragged down with him. The kids . . . yelling, crazy with hate, were doing their best to tear me limb from limb. I stopped trying to rip up Rafe Oshinsky. I had my hands full beating off those kids.

"I'm trying to help you!" I shouted at them. "I'm trying to save you—"

They were deaf, or they didn't care. They were only children, but there were so many of them . . . and a strong man can be killed by ants, if there are ants enough. It didn't make sense. The kids should have been on my side! Those angry red welts on their skinny chests couldn't have made them like Oshinsky

much. I recognized some of them, those nearest, as the pupils of Erica's playground. The missing children of Second Avenue . . . I called on them by name, pleaded with them.

It wasn't I who kept them from slaughtering me. It was Rafe Oshinsky. I wouldn't have believed there was that much in him. But of course, he had the whip.

I wondered why he was trying to save my life, and then I realized that he was trying to save his own. Those children were blind with blood-lust, but somehow, while the whole situation took on a different aspect in my mind, he succeeded in driving them to a far corner of the big gym.

Rafe locked the kids off by pulling a folding gate across the gym corner. Then he turned to face me, wiping blood from his eyes, to get a look at me. . . .

And then I was looking down the cold eye of a gun-muzzle.

"Damn you, boss," said Rafe, "you may be paying me good money, but you can't get away with this."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Babes in Bombs

**I** THOUGHT he hadn't gotten all the blood out of his eyes, and couldn't tell who I was so I yelled something to give him a general idea of how I felt, and a specific idea of my name . . . but that didn't make any difference. He kept closing in on me, and if ever I saw murder in a man's eyes, it was in Rafe Oshinsky's.

"You rotten hypocrite!" he shouted at me. "You thought if you paid me enough, you could get me to do your dirty work without trying to find out who I was working for. Rafe Oshinsky ain't such a fool—I've known about you for a long time, I know how you teach the kids to fly

these little planes, after I toughen 'em up so's they won't mind a little danger. I knew it tonight, but I didn't say anything till I could see whether I was going to get blamed for that killing or not."

I couldn't talk—there wasn't anything to say. My mind was trying to digest a good-sized impossibility. But if Rafe saw the struggle of incomprehension in my face; it didn't come across to him, because his next words proved that he still thought I was his boss.

"I didn't know what your game was till tonight, when I saw Young Mondego die. That made me pretty sick, but I didn't say anything to the cops, because Rafe Oshinsky ain't the kind that squeals on a boss. But if you think now that you've got the cops with you, that you can get out from under and leave me with the blame, you just bring on your cops, I can prove to them what your angle is in this."

My mind was starting to work again. "How can you prove it, Rafe?" I asked.

His florid features were beginning to swell from the beating they'd taken. Now they widened in a crafty grin. "There ain't nothing perfect, Mr. Varney. You can teach kids to mind you better than grown-ups. You can even be surer they won't tell secrets. But don't forget I taught 'em with this." He stroked the whip caressingly. "It taught 'em to keep secrets—and it got secrets out of 'em. They jump, all right, when the whip cracks—I know where you keep those little planes, Mr. Varney, and I know where you train the kids to fly 'em, after you get those kids back from me. Oh, I ain't actually seen them training—but I know how you give 'em the first lessens in public playgrounds, and I can put two and two together. So can anybody else, Mr. Varney . . . including the police."

My mind was working now. The dovetailing of impossibilities into fact had happened. "Okay, Rafe," I said. "You

win—you're a smart boy. What are you going to do next?"

He grinned meaningly. "I'm turning you over," he said. "Unless—maybe you have a better suggestion?"

"Sure I have," I said. "You're smart, I just said so. I guess you know why I've been training these kids. I guess you know the percentage."

He nodded, and tried to look as smart as I was giving him credit for, but he didn't say anything.

"Sure," I agreed. "You knew it tonight after the fight. You know I wanted the first killing to get lots of publicity—that's why the Mondego bout was broadcast. Get it? It's going to be smeared over every front page in the city tomorrow morning. People start wondering, they get a little scared. Tomorrow, there are a few more accidents. This time, the people who get killed are rich. And the day after tomorrow, every newspaper in the country carries a banner headline. The day after that—why, man, I can name my own terms to anybody from the mayor down! If they don't pay, or otherwise come across, it's curtains! And you know what I'm going to do for you, Rafe, because you're such a smart guy, and because you've been such a help to me? I'm going to make you a partner! Think of it, Rafe—fifty percent of unlimited credit on the whole world!"

I KNEW I was mouthing crazy things, things that couldn't be true by the wildest stretch of imagination, but when you're talking to a madman you use his language. And Rafe had certainly acted as crazily as any human being with whom I'd ever come in contact. I tried to quiet the hectic note in my voice, tried to make those fantastic utterances sound plausible. And to my relief, I realized that Rafe believed me. A look of greed crossed his swollen face. . . .

"Want to see how I train 'em, boss?"

he asked, with fawning pride. "I'll show you how I make 'em fight for food—"

He didn't have to show me. A fight had already broken out in the pen. A fight between a boy and a girl, neither of them over twelve. . . . I screamed at Rafe to make them stop. I tried to get through the gate myself. While the other children shouted him on, the small boy knocked the girl down, kneeled on her chest and systematically tried to gouge out her eyes. . . .

Rafe flicked his whip, roared bestial commands. He went into the pen, and laid the whip on heavy, till the boy whimpered away from his victim. . . .

I couldn't look. It make me pretty sick. Rafe came out, and apologized. "Sorry, boss. Always lose a few good chicks in the hatching—can't be helped."

I wanted to get at the bottom of the whole hellish set-up. And I wanted the worst of those kids away from the others. I managed to look into the pen, where a small eyeless thing that was already a corpse lay, and steeled myself to say, "If you've got a few of them ready for action—like that boy—let's take them with us, and go over to the training grounds now. Got a car?"

"Sure," said Rafe, glowingly. He whipped two of his young charges out of the pen, trussed and gagged them. We went out to Broadway with our unholy burden, and got into Rafe's big flashy sedan. I was supposed to know where the training ground was, but of course, I didn't. I let him take the wheel.

We went uptown, crossed the bridge to New Jersey in the quiet darkness, and headed north by west. . . .

A fleeting sense of tragedy came into my brain as the road we traveled went within half a mile of my own factory. A week ago I worked there with no thought for anything but my work—and now, devil's hands had spoiled what I had been building for years.

We went on, with the fog-light picking out a dirt road. Rafe couldn't stop talking about his future.

"You sure picked the right man, Mr. Varney, when you picked me. Nobody but me could 'a trained those kids! That adrenalin sure works swell with 'em, don't it? I found out about it in the war. They used to give it to yellow-bellies and make heroes out of 'em. There's some kind of highbrow explanation, but I don't care about that. I just know it helps me put on swell fights with the buns that come to me, calling themselves boxers.

"But you should'a known you could trust me, Mr. Varney. You didn't have to do business with me all this time without telling me your name. If you couldn't'a trusted me, don't you think I'd'a spilled that stuff tonight about Mondego? You got a good man when you got me."

An empty field loomed ahead of us, and the headlights picked out a rambling barn-like structure in the middle of it. I was sick to the point of nausea with Rafe's ghoulish, witless chatter, but I had a point to gain. The same thing that made me sick, made me stick to it.

"Well, here we are, Mr. Varney," Rafe said, braking the sedan to a stop. The car lurched suddenly sideways as a figure leaped to the running-board, and I felt the hard prod of a revolver in my ribs.

The man behind the gun was Brett Wyatt. He said, "Put your hands where I can see them, both of you, or I'll blow you to hell."

**R**AFE went to pieces. "Don't blame mel!" he whimpered. "It's all this guy's idea. He'll tell you I'm his partner, but that was just a blind. I was just tryin' to get the goods on him. I wouldn't'a gone through with it—honest, I wouldn't!"

I might have been made of ice, clean through, for all I was able to say or do. Brett's gun bored steadily into my ribs, and Brett's eyes bored steadily into my



face. Then, into the foglight glow of the parked sedan stepped a tall slender figure. She stopped there with the light on her face, looking at me with a kind of unbelieving horror. Erica!

Rafe, who had bragged of his trustworthiness, couldn't stop talking. "And I got him to come clean, too! He confessed to me back there how he was gonna send these little bombs of his to kill more people, and then he was gonna hold up the world with them!"

A final look of shocked belief came into Erica's eyes. She darted forward, opened the back door of the sedan, and cried out at the sight of the two little figures concealed there. Blue lightning glinted in her eyes. She cried at me, "You filthy murderous beast! I didn't want to believe it—but you've made me!"

"I guess that cinches it," Brett said with a hard note in his voice. "There's no phone here, so you'll have to go back to justice in the plane Erica and I came in. Come on—step out. And don't try to pull anything."

I stepped out of the car. The ice had suddenly all melted inside me. I felt like water. "Those two!" Erica cried. "Were you going to cut out their tongues, too, like you did to those others in the shack, so they couldn't testify against you?"

There was no good in a flat denial. I was enmeshed too hopelessly for that. Brett was saying something about the planes he and Erica had found here, model planes with my factory stamp all over them, planes big enough to carry a child. "You thought you'd have a free hand with me in jail, didn't you, Gil? I thought so, too. That's why I went. But I stayed there just long enough to give you plenty of rope. I suspected you at once, but I didn't have proof."

"Why, you—" I began, and then I decided to wait. It struck me as damned funny that Brett should be accusing me, when it was suddenly plain as daylight to

me who must have been the real instigator of those bomb-deaths—Oshinsky's real employer. There was one chance in a hundred left for me to prove my innocence, so I let Brett prod me toward his two-place monoplane with the gun. His other arm held Erica's. She was looking at me as though I were the foulest thing on earth, and knowing what she thought, I didn't blame her.

We were nearly to the plane when I shot my bolt. I whirled about, expecting the gesture to make Erica draw back at least enough to throw Brett off balance. She did. Her arm pulled his body sideways, and the bullet he intended for me whined harmlessly into the night.

That gave me a second's advantage, all I needed. I let Brett have it straight on the jaw. His teeth knocked together, and I slammed the gun from his grasp, catching it before it hit the ground. For the next half-minute he just took punishment—and then he went groggy.

I half-pulled, half-dragged Erica into the plane with me. Far down the field, Oshinsky was yelling at me to wait for him. I didn't. The plane was equipped with a starter.

**E**VEN in mid-air, Erica fought me like a lioness, as though neither my life nor hers were worth two cents. But I managed to quiet her as I circled the field. Eventually, it dawned on her that I wasn't making a get-away and making her share it. Then her struggles subsided, and she screamed at me, "Where are you going?" "Wait and see!" I yelled. She didn't have to wait long. From the field below, tiny pursuit planes were already rising. They seemed a dozen shining translucences in mid-air, like giant fireflies. The bomb-planes. . . .

"Doesn't that prove it?" I asked Erica, as I spiralled upward. "If I'm the instigator of these attacks, why should I be attacked? Do you think anyone can be di-

recting those things but the man who's really behind this?"

Her lips formed a name, but I didn't hear it, and I had to stop looking at her. One of those bright flares, with a child's angry face in the heart of it, was coming straight for us, blindly. Collision meant instant death. I dived, pulled up in a half loop and rolled out at the top. Another plane was attacking from above. I whipped into a half-roll and horsed back on the stick.

I was heading for the ground now—I had exonerated myself, and now there was only a reckoning. Just to make sure that I had made my point clear to Erica, I shouted at her above the melee of a thousand humming cylinders, "He doesn't even care about you now—he's scared. He's trying to kill us both." I thought I read comprehension in her white face.

There was a thundering detonation as two of the small pursuit planes crashed into each other—and then I slipped down to the ground.

Oshinsky and Wyatt were working together, now. They closed in on us, shooting, as soon as we landed. That clinched my proof with Erica—for Oshinsky must have realized, when he saw Brett sending the planes up after me, that Brett was his real boss—that he'd have to work with Brett to save his own dirty neck.

Putting myself between Erica and the line of fire, I drew the gun I'd taken from Brett, and aimed. Hot lead nicked my cheek. I fell to one knee, and let Oshinsky have it in the heart. Bullets flew behind me, thudded harmlessly into earth. . . . Brett's gun-hand was hurt. I hurt it a little more. He howled, and dropped. I didn't want Brett to die—I wanted him to confess first.

Suddenly I found myself wanting another and perfectly irrelevant thing—to flatten against the earth, and rest. I'm no hero, and whatever heroism there was in me had gone its limit for the night. I tried to fight against it, but I knew the danger was over. That knowledge was too much for my aching muscles, and they quietly caved in.

I was conscious of Erica taking the gun from my fingers and holding Brett at bay.

And then the night roared thunder. It was the climax to this miasma of horror: The kids couldn't land those planes without blowing them up! That had been



Brett's way of insuring himself against discovery!

\* \* \*

Police got a confession out of Brett. He hadn't of course, meant to terrorize the world with his planes, though he may have toyed with the idea in a half-crazy way. A plan like that simply wasn't feasible. But the very fact that those planes couldn't be concealed long as murder-weapons was the strength of the usefulness he intended for them. I wasn't sure of his motive until Erica promised to marry me. Then she told me, too, that Brett had proposed to her earlier. She had told him she was in love with me. That was why Brett had taken my interest in aeronautics and children and given both a gruesome twist, to get me out of the way, and to make Erica hate my memory. And he had planned to pay himself for his trouble—to the tune of a million dollars or so—by a

few quick blackmails before turning me over to the law.

Those little planes had even been assembled by prize students from my class at the playground, although Brett, out of his inventiveness, had supplied the design, and ordered the parts from my plant. The children, of course, had not known that in the end they would be called on to make a suicide flight. And I hadn't suspected it when I went up, and allowed Brett to send them up after me.

I'm no longer the New Year's pilot—in fact, that flight on the desolate field, with a dozen child-piloted bombs in pursuit, was the last of my career. People thing I've gone a little queer on the subject, but I don't like to go near an airport, or to talk about aeronautics. Only to Erica can I explain—how I sometimes wonder if man hasn't attempted too much in his conquest of the air. And Erica understands.

THE END

## THE INVISIBLE KILLER

By John Kobler

No barred door could stop the fiendish, corpse-defiling Thing that prowled Park Avenue on its hideous trail of slaughter! No bullet could turn it from its trackless course! High in the luxurious, sacrosanct tower-apartments of New York's Four Hundred, it struck again—and vanished. . . . Would Eagle Coyle, the ace detective, dare follow a hunch to The Invisible Killer's inviolate murder chambers—when the lovely girl over whom he stood sleepless vigil was next on its grisly waiting list? . . . For thrilling detective-mystery drama, in the bizarre setting of New York City's eerie subterranean depths, don't miss John Kobler's latest novel—in the January-February issue of *Strange Detective Mysteries!*



Also in this all-star issue, you'll want to read the three featured novelettes—Schachner, Milton Lowe's "Enter, The Corpse-Maker!" and Ray Cummings' "The Case of the Faceless Corpses"—

10¢ **STRANGE  
DETECTIVE  
MYSTERIES**

and the short stories and features of weird and ghastly crime by Arthur Leo Zagat, Norvell Page and other leading writers of blood-chilling mystery fiction!

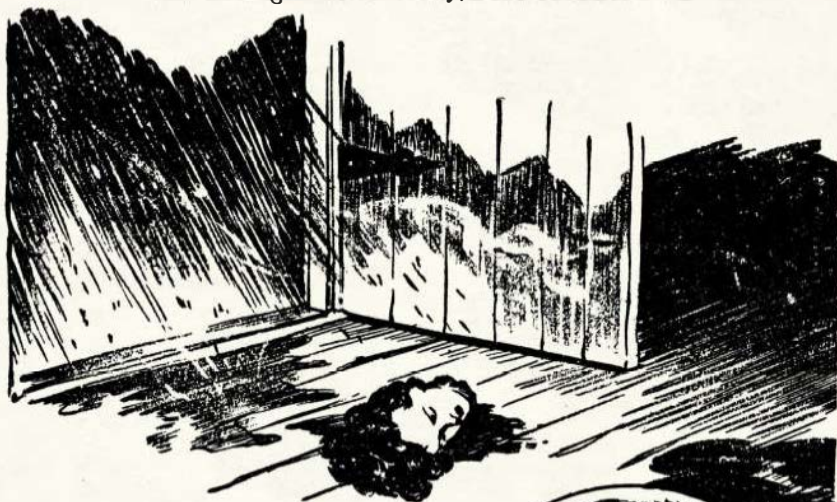
January-February issue will be out  
Dec. 1

Reserve a copy at your newsstand  
today!

# Dead Hands Seek

by DANE GREGORY

*Fearfully we watched as Connie stepped out into the storm-swept night that enveloped the little hunting lodge, and we prayed that she was right when she had laughed at the fear that was driving my wife mad—that Crazy Charlie had returned from the grave to hold her again in his loathsome arms! But Connie returned to warn us of the truth; and her message was a bloody, severed head! . . .*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Hell's Hunting Lodge

“**T**HERE is a storm coming up,” Sheila said. I think she meant to speak aloud, but the words came in a whisper that was barely audible in the room. Looking sharply at her, I saw that the delicate oval face under the swirl of honey-blonde hair was pale, deathly pale. The warm red curve of her mouth contrasted strangely with that frightening pallor.

I don't remember now what I said; some inanity meant to be reassuring. Lifting my gaze from her countenance, I met the dark eyes of Connie—who loved her mistress almost as much as I—and in



them I saw a blend of understanding, pain and compassion.

Both of us knew that the fear had returned to Sheila; the fear that haunted her days and plagued her dreams; the fear

# My Bride

*A Novelette of a Ghoul Who Came Back  
From Death to Claim the Girl He Had  
Lost*



that had driven the three of us, like fugitives, into this lonely hunting lodge thirty miles northeast of Seattle, locked away among the sighing firs that clothed the Cascades.

"An obsession." That was how Dr. Emil Gartner had referred to it. "I have done what I could. I have tried hypnosis, mental suggestion and every other conceivable method to purge her subconscious of this lurking horror."

The psychoanalyst had shaken his hand-

some leonine head in a somber gesture of resignation. "The fact that the dream is recurring more frequently in recent weeks seems to indicate that your wife's case is a hopeless one, Mr. Barrett."

I moistened dry lips. "But something must be done. Things can't go on this way, Dr. Gartner. If they do—"

I broke off, unable to frame the thought that had harried me night and day during the past weeks. That had burdened my brain intolerably as I watched the growing dread in Sheila's eyes; as I woke beside her at night and realized by her tortured face and cold-dewed body that once again that monstrous thing was pursuing her

lustfully down the corridors of dream.

It was the psychoanalyst who clothed my thought in words. "Yes," he said gravely. "If things continue in this fashion, your wife will undoubtedly go mad, Mr. Barrett. I do not mean to be cruel; I merely speak frankly to prepare you for the brutal probability."

**H**IS slim, womanish fingers laced themselves together. "Mrs. Barrett's dreadful experience as a girl, and her subsequent illness, have left an almost ineradicable mark upon her mind, and these nightmares are the manifestation of it. She lives in constant fear of the idiot that comes to her in dreams, but above and beyond that there is a more ghastly fear, Mr. Barrett. You doubtless know what I mean."

"Yes," I said numbly. "She has spoken of it—sometimes. She's afraid that some day that—that creature may materialize, doctor. She is terrorized by the thought that she will see his twisted face and hear his mad, gloating laughter—not in a dream but in actual life. The belief is rooted in her mind that some day Crazy Charlie will come from the grave to claim her."

Gartner lapsed into silence, and I knew that he was thinking of the incident in Sheila's life which had left this dark aftermath.

I had told him the story when, at the suggestion of my cousin Bob Sperry, Sheila and I had first consulted the psychoanalyst two months before. It was a grim story.

Sheila had been only sixteen when the thing happened; a slim, golden-haired girl just blossoming into the nubile loveliness that fired my senses when I looked at her, that had been four years ago, three years before our marriage.

She had been walking home from a movie late one night in the little country town where she lived. Walking alone and unafraid, for it was one of those little

towns where nothing ever happens. But on this occasion something *had* happened; something hideous beyond words.

Crazy Charlie, they called him—the malformed and mindless creature that had overtaken her that dark night. He was a town character whom everyone had previously regarded as harmless enough. Harmless? The sight of Sheila, alone and unprotected, had set the dark flames of desire flickering in his cloudy brain; had converted him suddenly into a slaving, lust-driven maniac.

Sheila's agonized screams, rising above the unholy laughter of the idiot, had saved her from the ultimate horror. Her cries brought three men from a neighboring house; men who were inflamed to violent action when they found the girl's golden nudity cradled in the arms of a loathsome thing that slobbered and chuckled over its prize.

Cheated of his prey, Crazy Charlie had fought with a bestial savagery that ended only when his misshapen body, beaten into a scarlet pulp, lay motionless upon the street. He had died that night.

And as for Sheila, the shock of that ghastly experience had been too much for the sensitive mechanism of her mind. Stricken with brain fever, she had lain for days on the verge of death, menaced in her tortured delirium by the warped and gloating face of the imbecile. Ultimately—thank God—she had recovered; but in the ensuing three years Crazy Charlie had returned to her periodically in dreadful dreams.

She had told me these things shortly after I met and fell in love with her during the course of a business trip that had taken me to her home town. And I had drawn her warm curves tight against my body and had assured her that we would fight the shadow together.

Well, we had fought it, she and I, but the shadow was darkening hourly over our lives. With the frightful dream re-

curring almost every night during the past few weeks, both of us had realized that there could be but one conclusion—madness. We read the same thought in the eyes of Connie Barclay, who for two years had served as Sheila's devoted nurse and maid.

THE bleak finality of Dr. Gartner's words seemed to close the coffin lid upon our last hope. "I can do nothing more," he said.

"But surely you can suggest something," I insisted desperately. "Damn it, man, I can't just sit still and watch her go mad before my very eyes!"

His pale, intellectual brow creased in meditation. "Perhaps a change of scenery would be good for her," he said at last in a tone that conveyed no assurance. "Perhaps if you could take her away from the city for a while—out into the clean air of the forest—her tired soul would be refreshed and she would forget this phobia."

His tapered hands laved each other in a gesture ominously Pilate-like. "You understand, my friend, that I do not promise such a thing will happen. It is a suggestion—nothing more."

Only a suggestion: but Sheila and I had accepted it like hungry dogs seizing upon a bone. Our first thought had been of Bob Sperry and of the big log-hewn hunting lodge in the Cascades which was one of his few possessions. The lodge was a meager heritage from a father who had squandered the Sperry wealth and left his son only empty memories of the spend-thrift years.

During the summer months, Bob frequently went to the place to dabble at the oil canvasses with which he made a desultory living; but this was early fall and the lodge would be deserted. I knew that he would be glad to let us occupy it for a while. Bob was my closest friend as well as my only living relative. More than

once I had helped him out with loans from my own considerable fortune—the legacy of a less prodigal father than his own.

"Why, sure," he said when I went to see him. "Take plenty of provisions along and stay a year if you want to. Glad to be of some help to you, Dave—God knows you've been a friend in need to me."

He put his hand on my shoulder, and the gray eyes set in the lean, tanned countenance were very gentle. "Sheila will get over this—this fixation, Dave. I know she will."

But in his words I recognized the same absence of hope with which Dr. Gartner had spoken. All of us knew what the end would be.

SHEILA had been right when she said that a storm was near. I stood at the window of the long, rectangular living room and looked out into the brooding darkness that massed itself against the cabin. The tall firs at the edge of the clearing were dipping slightly, like hooded acolytes at the beginning of some dark ritual; and I could hear the sibilant voice of the wind keen higher as the storm prepared to pounce.

Not a benevolent augury for our first night in the cabin, I thought grimly. But I turned back to Sheila and Connie with a fixed smile on my lips.

"Just a flurry," I said. "It'll be over in an hour."

My wife sat wordless as I piled fresh fuel in the open fireplace. Then:

"We shouldn't have come here, Dave," she whispered. "It's no use."

"No use? Nonsense! This is just the place for you, darling. Tomorrow the three of us will explore the woodland and maybe get chased home by a hungry Bruin. . . . You'll forget this—forget everything, dear."

She sat motionless, face pallid in the dim glow of the candlelight.

"YOU'RE just tired." I said soothingly. "It was a long, tough drive from Seattle."

"No." The muted hopelessness in her voice was a blow over my heart. A long, despairing breath lifted the ripe curves of her bosom. "No. . . . I wanted to come here, Dave, but now that we're here I'm afraid—more hideously afraid than I've ever been before. Somehow I feel that he—he is near me tonight. That tonight he will come for—"

"Listen!" An abrupt spasm of horror stiffened her body; drained the blood from her face to leave it like grey parchment. I leaped to her side, afraid that she was about to topple in a swoon from the chair. Connie was with me, murmuring soft, feminine words of assurance.

"Did—did you hear it?" Sheila asked in a choked voice.

"Hear what?" I demanded. "Darling, what was it?"

"His voice! Oh, God, I was sure I heard it—his laughter in the wind!"

I listened, my nerves strung taut by the pitiful conviction in her cry. In spite of myself, I felt a cold finger of dread measure my spine. But there was no sound outside—no sound except the rising voice of the wind and the rustle of the bending trees.

"Sweet, you're imagining things. You've got to get hold of yourself."

I bent my head and kissed her gently. She clung to me in a kind of desperation, her warm lips parting and responding to mine as if it were our last kiss. The blood was running hot in my veins when at last she relinquished her feverish grip on my shoulders.

"It's eleven o'clock," I said, glancing at my watch. "Why don't you go to bed and get some sleep? You're exhausted."

"Sleep?" Sheila laughed bitterly. "And dream of—of Crazy Charlie again? Oh, Dave, let me stay awake until I die!"

She was on the verge of hysteria, and

I knew that something would have to be done to distract her mind. I got the deck of cards we had brought along; suggested a game of three-handed bridge. Sheila tried pitifully to smile as we sat down at the rough pine table and began to play.

That was a strange game of cards. All of us played mechanically, only half aware of what we were doing. Connie—poor, brave girl—kept up a running fire of chatter at the beginning of the game, and I attempted feebly to respond. But there was a growing sense of disquiet in the cabin, a tension born of the solitude or the thickening storm, and before long our voices died into silence.

Yet we kept on playing. We played until my eyeballs were hot coals in my head and my whole body hungered for rest. We played until the storm had risen to the peak of its fury, pounding savagely against the cabin and splitting the night with the wail of a thousand eldritch voices. Vagrant eddies found their way between the mud-chinked logs of the cabin, and the wavering beams of the candles over our heads sent shadows dancing grotesquely on the wall.

Still we played, picking up our cards like senseless automatons, bidding without any interest in the game. Occasionally my gaze would steal furtively to Sheila's wax-white face; then veer away from the palpable dread that haunted her eyes.

At last I could stand it no longer. I flung my cards on the table and yawned.

"Let's resume this game tomorrow," I said. "It's time for all decent people to be in bed."

And at that moment Sheila screamed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Woods Hide Death

I CAN'T find the words to describe the stricken, knife-edged cry that seemed to be torn in rasping agony from her



throat. No words could encompass it. I can only say that the frenzied horror in her voice stopped my heart and froze my body into a rigid crouch. Motionless as a cadaver, I hunched over the table with my vacuous stare fixed upon the nightmare glaze in Sheila's eyes, while endlessly the ululating echoes of her cry seemed to throb within the room.

Connie regained her voice and her ability to move before I did. She sprang to Sheila's side; whispered through jerking lips:

"What—what is it? Are you ill?"

"God!" Sheila sobbed. "Oh, God in heaven! I knew it—all the time I have felt that he would come tonight! And now—" A long shudder racked her lovely, young body.

"Sheila!" I said hoarsely. "What do you mean?"

"Crazy Charlie—outside the cabin. Oh, Dave, I saw him—I tell you I saw him! His face was pressed against that window back of your head, and I—I looked up into his eyes. . . . Into his mad, hungry eyes and his grinning face."

My gaze leaped to the window; but it was only an empty black oblong in the wall.

A paroxysm of weeping stormed Sheila's body. "He was just as I have seen him in dreams. But this is no dream, Dave—it's all real. Crazy Charlie has come from the grave to take me—as I have always known he would. . . ."

Connie tenderly stroked the bowed head, and our gazes locked. Madness? In her eyes I saw the bleak verdict that must also have been in mine.

"You're tired and overwrought, Mrs. Barrett," Connie said gently. "There's no one within miles of us. I'm going outside to prove to you that there is nothing to fear."

And before either of us could frame a protest—before I knew quite what was happening—Connie had thrown a wrap

about her shoulders and had gone out into the storm-tossed darkness. The slam of the door jerked a sharp gasp from Sheila.

"Dave! Oh, get her—get her! You shouldn't have let her go. She's walking to her death!"

I drew my wife's trembling body against my own. "Nonsense," I said. "She's perfectly safe. There is nobody out there, and she'll be back unharmed in a minute."

I pray that some day a compassionate God may find it in His heart to forgive me for those words.

We waited. We waited one minute—two—three. No sound outside the cabin except the ghoulish cacophony of the winds. No sound inside the cabin except Sheila's broken sobs as she clung desperately to me.

And still Connie did not return. The crawling moments brought nothing but those reiterated sounds—and now stealthy fear began to tighten my scalp and ice the blood in my veins. For there was no conceivable reason why Connie shouldn't have come back long before this.

Sheila's honey-gold head dropped to my chest. "Dave," she babbled hysterically, "go out to her! Probably it's too late now, but you—you've got to try to save her. Oh, God, we can't just wait here while Crazy Charlie—"

Her voice died away, muted by an ecstasy of fear that shook her body like a wind-driven reed. And still I waited, palms cold with perspiration, heart slogging like that of a spent runner. Inexorably, my wrist watch continued to measure the passing moments.

Something was devilishly wrong. I knew it now, and with the realization came the necessity for action. Gently I disengaged Sheila's hands and moved to the door. Flung it wide against the rioting storm.

A vicious blast of wind met me at the doorway and tried to hurl me back into

the room. I braced myself in the aperture and tossed a single word out into the night:

"Connie!"

No answer. . . .

Or was there? What but an answer was the sound that wafted back to me in the teeth of the gale, lifting the hackles on my neck and holding me there in a trance of stunned incredulity?

Laughter in the wind. Mad, gloating laughter that could have been born in no human throat. . . .

And what but an answer was the object that came from the unfathomable darkness beyond the door; that rolled sluggishly over the threshold and drew to a grisly halt at Sheila's feet?

**I** BUNCHED my muscles; slammed the door shut just in time to turn and catch the inert body of my wife. Holding her in my arms, I looked down at the ghastly thing on the floor, the gorge rising hot in my vitals. Then I closed my sick eyes, and tried to remember Connie as she had looked striding valiantly out into the storm.

Now the soft dark hair was a welter of clotting scarlet, and the black eyes stared upward in glazed and sightless vacuity. Where once that slim throat had melted into the soft upper slope of her breast, there was now only a spate of dreadful crimson. The killer's blade must have sheared in one sweeping arc through flesh and bone and sinew, decapitating her with the ruthless efficiency of a guillotine.

And then the sadistic fiend who lurked outside had tossed that dismembered head into the doorway—had laughed tauntingly as he flung us the souvenir of his crime.

I laid Sheila's sagging body in the bunk at one corner of the room. With a blanket I screened from sight that thing on the floor. I turned to see that Sheila's eyes were fluttering as merciless consciousness came back to her.

"Dave—Dave— Oh, my poor, dear Connie!"

"Steady, dear." I chafed her cold wrists with trembling hands. "Sheila, it—it isn't Crazy Charlie. It couldn't be. But you were right about one thing. There's somebody out there—some mad hermit from the hills above us, probably. I won't lie to you—we're in terrible danger here."

Her hands opened in heart-breaking appeal. "It's Crazy Charlie. I saw his dead, grinning face. I heard him laugh. In a little while now his—his hands will touch me again. Oh, Dave—what can we do?"

"We've got to get to the car, dear, and drive to the nearest house for help. Can you walk?"

I picked up the stoutest cudgel of firewood I could find, mentally cursing the ranger who had relieved me of my Winchester at the edge of the game preserve. I knew it was folly, going virtually unarmed into the night; braving the stormy darkness and the menace of a blood-hungry lunatic who was apparently armed with a cleaver. But we would be guilty of worse folly, I thought, to wait there like rats in a trap while the lunatic prepared to strike.

Sheila made no protest. In a kind of stupor she let me slip a wrap about her shaking body and lead her to the threshold. As I opened the door, the vengeful storm gods seemed to mass their fury in one savage barrage of wind into the cabin. Behind us, the room was drowned in sudden blackness as the candles reeled and expired before the assault. And then we stepped forth.

Every moment of that long journey through the storm is etched ineffaceably in my mind. I remember the sound of the giant firs tossing their wracked limbs against the sky; the frozen clutch of Sheila's hand as we staggered into the driving gale; the smothering darkness that pressed

like something tangible against our eyes.

And I will carry to my deathbed the memory of the soft, huddled thing that we stumbled over not far from the cabin. A thing that left my groping fingers damp and sticky; that shook my wife from her dazed apathy and tore a little sobbing cry from her lips.

The softness of still-warm flesh told me that it was Connie's body, fallen where the madman had swung his blade.

I tightened my grip on Sheila's arm and jerked her away from the spot. With every moment thickening the peril about us, there was no time to waste over that pitifully mangled corpse. The bestial handiwork of the prowler was mute evidence of what lay in store for both of us—unless we hurried, hurried. . . .

THE trip seemed endless, though the rude lean-to that served as a garage was only a hundred feet or so north of the cabin. We found it at last—when a jagged bayonet of lightning ripped across the sky and bathed the earth in momentary light.

My heart leaped at the prospect of escape from this terror-haunted wood. Behind the familiar wheel of the sedan, I cradled Sheila's spent body with one arm and trod down on the starter.

The futile whirl of the motor prepared me for what I was to discover when I finally got out of the car. With a feeling of sick despair, I lifted the hood and groped in the interior of the machine.

I found what I had expected to find. Ruthless hands had ripped away the wiring and done their worst to other parts of the motor. Impossible to estimate the damage, but I knew that it would take hours to make the necessary repairs. We were stranded here, walled from safety and civilization by miles of spreading forest land.

With the realization came certain knowledge that the maniac had not sated his hunger with the wanton butchery of

Connie. He had not gone his way. Here was evidence that we were intended to be the next victims, the major threads in his grisly pattern of lust and murder. Here was evidence, too, that a sly human intelligence was weaving the pattern.

As gently as possible, I told Sheila what had happened. She sagged into my arms, and her voice was numb with hopelessness.

"Dave, where can we go? What—what can we do?"

"We'll go back to the cabin, dear, and bar the doors. I'll keep him away, darling—I swear to that."

"The cabin? Oh, Dave, no—no! It will know we're there. It—"

I silenced her protests with a hurried kiss. Half-dragging, half-carrying her, I shouldered my way back toward the cabin. I knew it would be suicidal to stay out here in the night, where at any moment the lurking thing might steal upon us. The shelter of firm walls was our one hope.

We reeled through a long nightmare of storm and darkness. It was the sound of the open door banging in the wind that told me we had finally reached the cabin. Inside at last, I flung the door shut and slid the rusty bolt in place. Groping in the abysmal blackness of the room, I found one of the dead candles and lit it with a match from my pocket.

The slender flame cast sickly light over Sheila's terror-waxen face. She swayed before me, gaze fixed on the flimsy barricade of the door. She realized as well as I that the madman's blade could slash through that obstacle in a matter of minutes.

I steadied her with one arm. My eyes found the crude log ladder that led through a trapdoor to the loft of the cabin. The upper story consisted of a single, sprawling room where my cousin had bunked and done his painting. That was the place for Sheila, I realized. There she would

be out of the way when the death-struggle came, as I knew it inevitably would.

She didn't want to go. She clung frantically to me and begged me to let her stay. But I was adamant. I urged her firmly up the ladder, and the trapdoor dropped shut to leave me alone in the room.

My eyes probed the shadows in desperate search of a weapon. Armed only with a cudgel of wood, I knew that I would be powerless as a rag doll against that ravening creature of the night. And there was no time to spare. The thing would strike soon—it had dallied and toyed with us long enough.

My scalp crawled in dread as the premonitory warning sounded in my brain. The whole atmosphere of this crepitating old house was surcharged with menace. It was as if there were eyes upon me—mad, gloating eyes. As if the very shadows teemed with poisonous life.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *A Madman's Blade*

**A** WEAPON! My heart leaped as a thought occurred to me. There was a carving knife in the stock of utensils we had brought from the city—a knife with a clean, sharp edge. It would be a pitiful little weapon to match against the lunatic's cleaver, but if I could only manage to drive that narrow blade home—

I picked up the candlestick, and the trembling flame cast fitful light ahead as I moved into the kitchen.

All my senses had been keyed to horror by the previous incidents of that dreadful night. Probably I should have been prepared, both mentally and physically, for the ultimate horror. Probably, too, I should have foreseen that the thing would enter the cabin during our absence.

But I was utterly unprepared. Face to face with it, I lost the power of thought

and of movement. I stood there paralyzed, the candlestick clutched in my frozen hand, the blood congealing in my veins. And for a long moment my mind wallowed in stark madness.

The monster crouched in the pooled darkness of the kitchen, its obscene face only partly illumined by the thin wash of candlelight. But the light was clear enough to stamp that face indelibly on my brain. I saw the mad, staring eyes, the aborted features, the lips that were twisted into a drooling grimace of triumph. I saw the dank thatch of straggling black hair and the dead grey skin that was like rotting cloth drawn over a skull.

And I knew, then, that Sheila had been right. This hell-born thing was Crazy Charlie. Goaded by an undying lust, the idiot had broken the bondage of the grave and had returned to claim the living.

The revenant lifted its bloody cleaver, and a burst of lewd, mocking laughter gushed from the wet lips. A terror-torn scream from above told me that Sheila had heard—and the sound wrenched me from my stupor. Galvanized to action, I flung the candlestick savagely at that bloated caricature of a face.

The creature dodged, and darkness blotted out the room as the candle struck the kitchen wall. Instinctively, I leaped to one side, evading gruesome death by a split second. The cleaver hurled past my head with a force that would have slashed me in two. I felt the cold wind of its passage against my ear; then the huge blade buried itself with a jarring concussion somewhere in the wall behind me.

I lunged forward, hands curved in savage hunger for the creature's throat. They found only empty darkness. I groped frantically, red rage flaring in my brain. I wanted to touch the thing, to strangle it, to feel its body dissolve in final putrefaction as I extinguished the last spark of unholy life.

But there was nothing there. Only

blackness. Somehow it had managed to elude me.

A ghoulisn cackination of laughter froze me in my tracks. It came from behind—and icy sweat dewed my body as I realized what had happened. While I pawed ineffectually at the darkness, the cadaver had crept to the wall and retrieved its weapon.

I stood like a graven figure, my inwards crawling with sick terror. I'd been lucky so far, but I knew that my luck couldn't hold. A single betraying movement, a single whisper of sound, would bring slashing death in the darkness. And Sheila would be in the power of a corpse-thing that had no mercy in its dead heart.

After that one peal of gloating mirth, the creature was silent. A pall of unbearable quiet settled over the room, broken only by the occasional creak of the ancient floor-boards. The thing was biding its time, waiting patiently for me to move. It was a game of deadly hide-and-seek in the dark.

I remained immobile, hardly daring to breathe, fearful that the agonized pounding of my heart would give me away. My muscles ached, and my nerves screamed for the relief of movement. Each passing moment was an eternity of torturing suspense.

And finally I could endure it no longer. I staked my last hope on the possibility that a ruse might thwart the dead thing. Slowly, stealthily, I fished a keyring from my pants pocket. Then, praying that the clink of metal would bait the creature to attack, I tossed it to the far corner of the room.

**T**HE sound was followed only by an eon of uneventful waiting. The one noise in the world was the eerie crescendo of the winds outside.

Then I went mad. Babbling curses, I flung myself forward, arms beating the empty air. Death meant nothing to me

then; I was as crazed as the creature from the grave. My body was goaded by the single burning desire to come to grips with the thing.

My hands met the rough wall and slithered questingly along it. They found nothing. Still that sepulchral quiet choked the room; still there was no rustle of movement other than my own. It was as I were prisoned in a vacuum.

Cold sanity returned to me when I touched the door. I had opened it when I entered the kitchen; now it was closed. I realized, then, that I was alone in the room. Crazy Charlie had stolen noiselessly away, easing the door shut while I crouched there in motionless dread.

With the realization, my heart stopped in the strangle-clutch of a fear greater than any I had known that night. As if to confirm the fear, there was a sudden cascade of piercing screams above my head—screams that swelled upward and then were drowned in the unspeakable laughter of the cadaver. The blood turned to water in my veins as the meaning of that sound wedged itself in my brain.

The thing was in the loft—with Sheila. It had found her. With a mad cunning that must have had its inspiration in hell, Crazy Charlie had outwitted me at every turn. He had been playing with me as a cat toys with a mouse, prolonging the agony to keen its senses for the bloody climax.

Sheila screamed again. Husking savage curses, I hurled myself through the doorway and beat an erratic course into the yawning pit of the living room. My frantic hands finally encountered the rough log ladder that arched to the loft. I swarmed up the rungs and flung the trapdoor open with a single heave.

The dancing fire of a candle seared my eyeballs. Back of it a putty-green face swam out of the murk and grinned down into mine. Crazy Charlie's face, twisted into a leer of unhallowed joy.

He gripped the candle in one taloned hand, and the waxy light played over the rotting broadcloth that shrouded him. In his other hand was the cleaver, and as he peered into my eyes he was lifting the hungry blade. I had a brief, foreshortened view of that murder-sharp edge; then it hissed downward toward my skull.

I lurched aside as it fell, and my feet slewed from the ladder rung. In sick panic I clawed at the empty air; then I was pitching head-first through space.

My shoulders slammed the floor with a thud that sent blinding searing pain through every part of my body. I struggled desperately to beat my way through the mists of agony that clouded my brain. It was useless. My last impression was a wavering picture of the ghoul's twisted face; then unconsciousness flowed over me like a tide.

**I** THINK it was the sound of Sheila's screams, ripped from her throat by the last extremity of fear, that finally brought me out of the void. For a lough while those screams beat against my eardrums without carrying any message to my numb brain; I was drugged with pain and shock. But consciousness gradually filtered back into my mind as the cries continued.

I opened my eyes; looked stupidly about me. Yellow light flickered somewhere nearby, and in its dim glow I could see a low, vaulted ceiling. I realized vaguely that I was in the loft of the cabin.

Other impressions slowly took form in my mind. A hazy memory of the events which had gone before. A consciousness of my bruised body. A realization that I could not rise; that I was seated on the floor with my hands behind me, trussed to one of the narrow uprights of the cabin.

Another stabbing scream brought the knowledge that something dreadful was transpiring in this room. My gaze swept to the corner at my left—about twelve

feet from where I sat—and there a ghastly tableau was spread before my eyes.

A single tall candle on a ledge overhead hazily illumined the scene. In its guttering light I saw—Sheila. The sight of her—and the thing bending over her—cleared my senses instantly. The shock of it would have brought me out of a far deeper coma.

My wife lay supine upon the bunk in the corner, her golden hair tumbling in wild disarray about the upturned oval of her face. I saw that she had willed into unconsciousness with that last, throbbing cry; waxen lids mercifully curtained her eyes from the menace that leaned over her. Lecherous hands had pulled the dress from her body and tossed it to the floor. She sprawled there in tortured loveliness, clad only in sheer silk stockings and gossamer underthings that enhanced rather than concealed the flowering curves of her body.

Crazy Charlie gloated over the vision, his dead face frozen into a mask of lustful anticipation. His dry hands rasped against the satin flexure of her thighs; caressed the firm plane of her stomach as if he were drawing the warmth of her into his own cold flesh. Even as I watched, maddened at the explorations of those blasphemous hands, he impatiently stripped the last remaining garments from her limp form.

The sight of Sheila's golden nudity, twisted in the abandonment of unconsciousness, held the creature thrall for a moment. His gaze clung to her in a rapture of mad desire. Then Sheila's torpor seemed to infuriate him. He seized the candle and brought its pallid flame close to the tip of one firm, mounded breast.

Sheila's eyelids fluttered open, and an agonized cry parted her lips as the searing pain lanced through her body. Mouth-ing unintelligible oaths, I strained savagely against the ropes that fettered my wrists. Crazy Charlie turned, momentar-

ily diverted by the sound of my voice. He picked up the cleaver and came toward me, a sadistic grin baring his teeth.

I closed my eyes and waited sickly for the skull-splitting fall of the blade. Amazingly, it did not come. When I opened my eyes, the corpse-thing was leering down at me, uncertainly fondling the cleaver. For an interminable moment he stood there while my muscles tensed in an icy sweat of expectation. Then he chuckled and tossed the weapon carelessly aside.

I knew why he was sparing my life; why he had not slaughtered me while I lay unconscious. Knew, too, why he had taken the trouble to carry me upstairs and truss me to the upright. I was to be the audience in this theater of hell, and my agonies would feed the creature's perverted joy as the abominable scene unfolded before my eyes. After that—death.

I tugged feverishly at the ropes which bound me, straining until my ligaments felt as if they would burst through the tortured flesh. But it was useless; my struggles seemed only to tighten the hard knots at my wrists. Helpless as a gaffed fish, maddened by the knowledge of my utter impotence, I watched the apparition shuffle back to his prey.

Sheila gazed up at him, her blue eyes drowned in horror indescribable. She did not move, did not cry out. Fear had drained her body of all resistance, leaving her powerless as a waxen figure.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Satan's Vengeance

THE mad thing slavered over her, his eyes reveling in the witchery of her pliant young curves. Sheila's warm flesh crawled in revulsion at the touch of his necrotic hands. I shook the upright in an excess of rage, curses spewing from my lips. Crazy Charlie laughed—a paean of

wild, taunting laughter that was terrible to hear.

"Sheila," I begged, "fight him! Oh, God, don't let him—"

My voice had no effect upon her. She lay there in an inertia of fear—so still that only the uncontrollable twitching of her flesh gave evidence of life. My eyes swiveled desperately about the room; then came to an abrupt halt. A tocsin of hope pealed suddenly in my brain.

Not more than five feet away lay the bloody cleaver, dropped from the idiot's careless hands. The sight of that sharp blade was an instant message. God, if I could only— A soundless prayer moved my lips as I straightened my body and thrust my feet stealthily toward the weapon.

There was no time to spare. Crazy Charlie was deliberately whetting his desire to the point where it would demand consummation. His fingers were gliding avidly over my wife's body, stroking, caressing, tightening with brutal hunger. His lips drooled above her quiescent loveliness as his touch became more savage, more demanding.

Perhaps he forgot my existence. At any rate, he was so engrossed that he did not hear the slow progress of the cleaver as I drew it clumsily forward with my feet, inch by halting inch. He did not see my agonized exertions as I edged to the other side of the upright and finally, after an eternity of muscle-racking effort, managed to bring my bound wrists near the blade. Nor did he hear the strands of rope yield one by one as I frantically sawed the knots against that sharp edge, ignoring the pain that stabbed my body when the blade cut through skin and flesh.

At the last moment, some sixth sense must have warned him. He turned from Sheila's rigid form; and a roar of bestial rage burst from his throat when he saw what was happening. He plunged forward, and there was murder in his eyes.

With a superhuman effort I strained against the upright. The last strand of rope yielded with a snap, freeing my bloody wrists just in time to let me meet that savage attack.

I had no opportunity to snatch up the cleaver. The thing was on me like a hurricane, flinging me back against the upright, tearing at my face with clawlike fingernails. I struggled weakly, dizzily, trying to protect my eyes from those taloned hands. Hot blood gushed down my face as the creature opened a long furrow in one cheek.

The pain cleared my mind, brought me a moment of deadly calm. I launched an uppercut that slogged viciously into the damp, yielding flesh of the thing's jaw. Crazy Charlie reeled backward and a cry of pain throbbed in the room. That sound carried a message of hope to my brain.

Whatever unnatural force animated that bloated carcass, the thing was not immune to natural laws. It could suffer pain, even as I. And that meant that there was a chance to defeat it, perhaps even to destroy it. As long as I was not fighting insensate clay—

The incubus was upon me again. This time I clinched with it; flung my weight savagely against its body. We went crashing to the floor, locked in a knot of straining, tortured flesh.

The creature was incredibly strong. It caught my arms in a vise of steel as we rolled on the floor. I fought like a madman, snarling, spitting oaths, writhing with the lust to kill, but I could not break that deadly hold. Crazy Charlie tightened his grip and heaved my shoulders suddenly to the floor.

The hideous face jerked downward toward mine, and bared teeth gripped my throat in lupine rage. Stabs of pain shot through my chest, my neck, my skull. My eyes swam in a maelstrom of darkness and agony. I could feel life ebbing from me as the blood poured in a crimson tide

down my chest, soaked into my clothes.

Crazy Charlie's grip on my arms relaxed as he sensed my fading resistance. I struggled to push him away, but there was no strength in my body. My arms dropped inertly to the floor, powerless as matchsticks. The fingers of my left hand came in contact with something cold and hard—something that sent a flood of new life through my flaccid body.

**CRAZY CHARLIE** realized what had happened—too late. By that time the cleaver was in my hand and I was swinging the blade upward with my last measure of strength. He had time to jerk his head aside, but not to avoid the blow. The weapon flashed in a vengeful arc, shearing hungrily through the flesh and bone of his right shoulder.

An unearthly scream tore from his lips as he swayed backward and fell in a heap to the floor. The sight of that prostrate body revived me like a healing drug. I flung myself upon him, gouging, clawing, tearing at the twisted face in an ecstasy of hatred.

The vile flesh yielded under my hands, sloughing away like some scabrous growth. It clung stickily to my fingernails. Nausea churned in my vitals as I continued to claw at that leering death mask; sickness that was followed by a shock of cold incredulity.

*Beneath the torn ribbons of pulpy matter was another face—a white face twisted in a grimace of dreadful pain!*

It was the countenance of—of—

The white lips framed sobbing words: "You've—got me, damn you! Should have—killed you when I—had the chance. . . . Always hated you, you damned plutocrat! . . . Not going to—hang for this. I'm dying now."

But Bob Sperty did not die that night.

He lived to tell the whole devilish story before death finally released him from his torment, two days later in a Seattle hos-



pital. It was the story of a man in whom greed, hatred and envy had festered and grown with the years, turning him at last into a ravening monster.

We learned that he had been working on his mad scheme for months; that he had plotted every detail with infinite patience and cunning. He had bribed the undertaker in Sheila's home town to provide him with a "morgue shot" of Crazy Charlie. Then, with the artistry that was an inherent part of him, he had carefully shaped that terrible disguise.

His materials were commonplace enough—the plastic clay used in Hollywood makeup, covered with a thin coat of grey-green rubber. But it seems to me that that deftly-wrought mask must have been endowed with a kind of soulless evil all its own, so that when Bob Sperry donned it he became indeed the mad, lusty thing he sought to mimic.

The motive behind his insane plot? Money.

Sheila would be found with the dismembered corpses of Connie and myself—evidence conclusive enough to brand her as a homicidal maniac. Her wild tale of a creature from the grave would add damning weight to the evidence—which would be strengthened further by the testimony of Sperry and Dr. Emil Gartner.

But my cousin was not content with that. A sadist by nature, he had planned

to subject Sheila to such unspeakable horrors that she would probably be mad in all truth when he had completed his work. Knowing the susceptible state of her mind, he had shaped his entire plan with the idea of preying on her fears and driving her to stark insanity.

With me dead and Sheila locked away in a madhouse, my cousin would be in full control of my estate. Connie's death was only incidental, of course, but it had served the twofold purpose of removing a witness and adding to Sheila's terror.

That gruesome confession was sufficient to implicate Dr. Gartner and send him to prison for ten years as an accessory. The psychoanalyst had been in my cousin's employ from the first. With hypnotism and mental suggestion he had driven the fear deeper and deeper into my wife's brain—so that the specter of Crazy Charlie haunted her night and day. . . .

Sheila's mind did not snap as a result of her experiences. She is well and happy today—and, oddly enough, the vision of the idiot no longer comes to plague her dreams. It is as if the horror of that second experience washed her mind forever clean of the first.

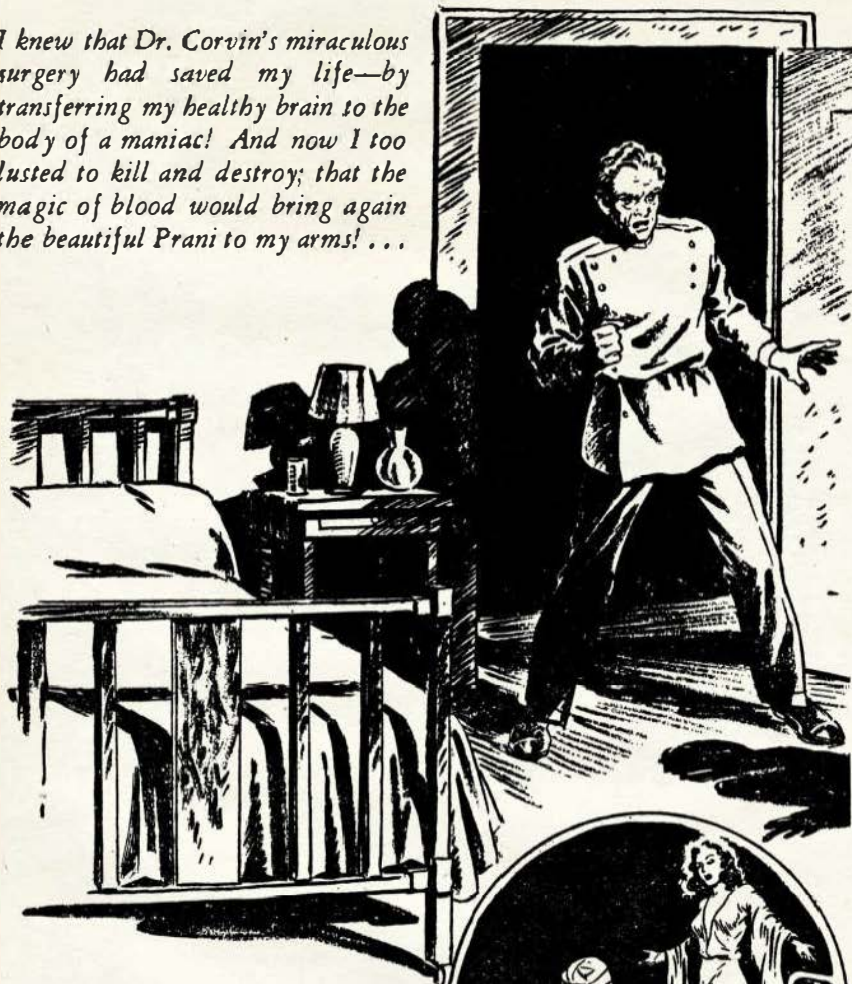
Yes, my wife is normal in every respect today—that is, except for one thing. And God knows I love her none the less for that. It seems to me that she is even lovelier with white hair.

THE END



# A Kiss for the Blood Lady

*I knew that Dr. Corvin's miraculous surgery had saved my life—by transferring my healthy brain to the body of a maniac! And now I too lusted to kill and destroy; that the magic of blood would bring again the beautiful Prani to my arms! . . .*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Pew for the Madman

**M**Y COUSIN HESTER met us at the railroad depot, and rode with us in the station wagon to Soledad Springs. She took us at once to the big rambling house of Dr. Corvin, the director of the desert resort.

There seemed to be no one about the place at the moment when we arrived;

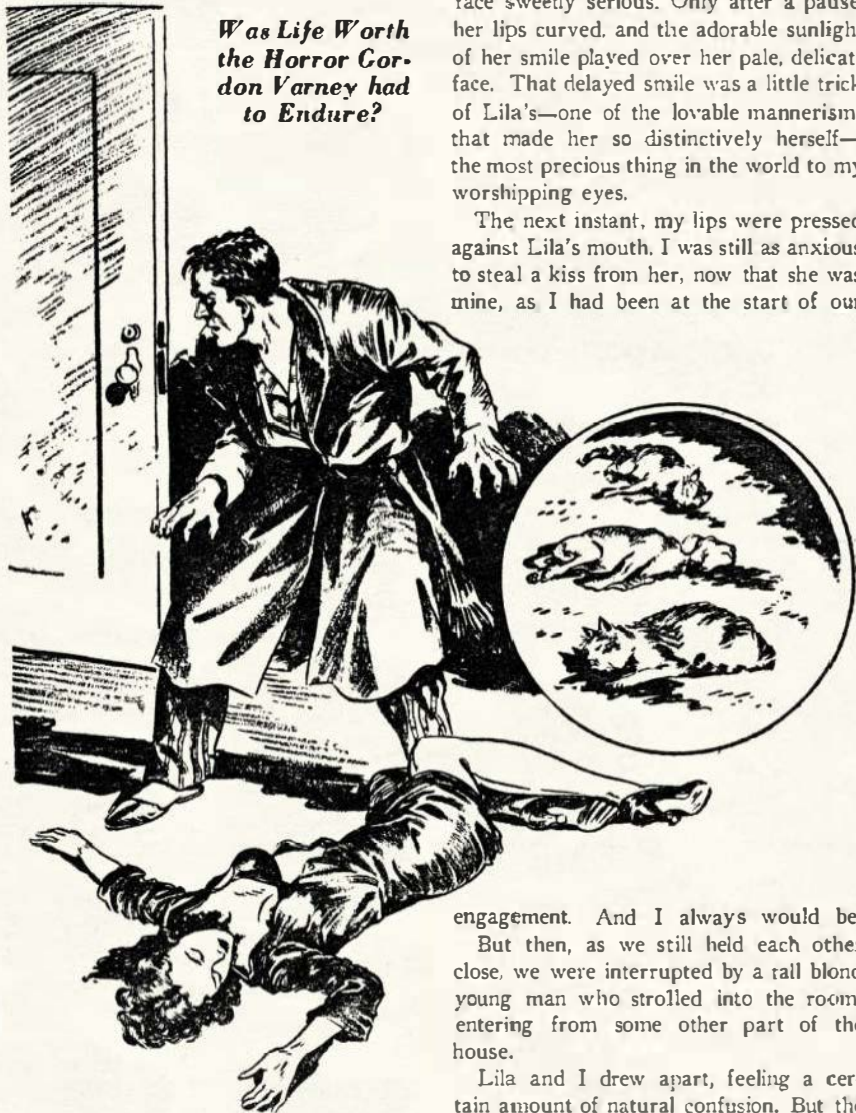
and so Hester told Lila and me to make ourselves at home in the spacious living room, while she went to find the doctor.

## A Novelette by RALSTON SHIELDS

*Was Life Worth  
the Horror Gordon  
Varney had  
to Endure?*

close to me. For a long moment, she gazed at me with her clear, still blue eyes, her face sweetly serious. Only after a pause, her lips curved, and the adorable sunlight of her smile played over her pale, delicate face. That delayed smile was a little trick of Lila's—one of the lovable mannerisms that made her so distinctively herself—the most precious thing in the world to my worshipping eyes.

The next instant, my lips were pressed against Lila's mouth. I was still as anxious to steal a kiss from her, now that she was mine, as I had been at the start of our



Lila and I were visiting the California desert on our honeymoon trip, and we did not feel the slightest objection to being left alone together. As soon as my cousin was gone from the room, I drew my wife

engagement. And I always would be.

But then, as we still held each other close, we were interrupted by a tall blond young man who strolled into the room, entering from some other part of the house.

Lila and I drew apart, feeling a certain amount of natural confusion. But the young man's smile was so pleasant, and his manner so casual, that we were soon at our ease again.

He held a purring kitten in his arms, and as he spoke he gently stroked the

little creature's soft fur. He introduced himself as Dr. Corvin's nephew; his name, he said, was Peter Anstey.

I liked young Anstey, instinctively—which may have been a form of vanity, because I noticed that he bore me a certain resemblance. Nothing striking: we were about the same height and build; our features had something the same cast. However, we were different in coloring. My own hair is dark, and my skin is rather white—whereas this young man was deeply tanned by the sun. Still, on the stage we might have been made up to resemble the same character—with the right grease-paint, and a moustache on his lip to match the one I wore at the time.

We continued to converse casually and pleasantly for a time; Anstey had sunk in a chair, and still ruffled the fur of his kitten while he spoke.

I think I knew the meaning of contentment at that moment; the future seemed a very good thing to look forward to. Lila at my side; the weeks of our honeymoon before us; and this place, Soledad Springs, lovely beyond our expectations—and the company excellent, too, if this pleasant lad was representative of the other guests. . . .

But then I was brought back to the present with a cruel wrench. A scream burst out close to me—a scream that ripped from Lila's throat, and sounded high and clear from her parted lips, with the ghastly, almost musical note of pure horror.

I followed the fascinated, fixed stare of her widened eyes.

**PETER ANSTEY**—the charming young man who sat facing us . . . God! The horror of that sight—the sickening, revolting savagery! It would not have been so dreadful if he had not gone about it so calmly, so casually. He did not even look at the kitten he held in his lap; he ignored Lila's shriek of anguished sur-

prise. But even while he continued to chatter gaily about some trifle of local gossip, his fingers were tightening around the throat of the little cat.

The beast's eyes were glazing as we watched: its tongue lolled pathetically between its stretched jaws. But Anstey paid no attention; he seemed almost absent-minded, as if he were crumpling a ball of old newspaper while he went on with his conversation.

One detail of the man's appearance struck me now, which I had not noticed before. It was slight enough; but under the circumstances it took on a kind of added revulsion. The end joint of one of the fingers of his right hand was missing, and a sort of little claw of bone projected beyond the stump of healed flesh. Even as I watched, the hand tightened more savagely about the kitten—and that one finger seemed almost like the talon of some remorseless vulture!

While Lila and I continued to stare at him, literally paralyzed with horror, Anstey glanced down at the cat in his lap, for the first time. At last he seemed to realize what he had done. Into his eyes crept a gleam of the most insane and fiendish sadism; a kind of brutish snarl bubbled in his throat. Then suddenly he bent over, tore at the limp body of the little animal—with bared teeth!

Blood spurted from the small pathetic corpse of the cat—and still that madman tore and slashed, until he was covered with sticky crimson, and bits of still quivering fur and flesh. That seemed to be his object—to cover himself with fresh blood! To wallow in hot gore, still bright and fluid, as a dog will roll in carrion!

I started forward, my trance at last overcome by rising indignation. I was going to snatch the pitiful remnant of the cat from the grasp of the maniac. . . .

But then, a broad, forceful looking man of about fifty entered the room. I realized this must be Dr. Corvin, the director.

As soon as Peter Anstey saw his uncle, he dropped the torn remains of the kitten, and stood there, quietly, as if he were a child waiting to be reprimanded.

And then, before anyone could move or speak, another person entered the room hurriedly: a man who was dressed in the white uniform of a professional nurse. He took in the scene at a glance, gasped with horror. "My God," he muttered—"the hall door—I forgot to lock it. I could have sworn . . ."

Corvin looked at him sternly. "You know you were never to let him out of your sight, Ashburn," he said, shortly. "Take him to his room. now. I'll speak with you later."

Lila and I were so horrified that our first impulse was to take our baggage, and leave the place immediately. God in Heaven, how often since we have regretted our failure to act on that impulse! If we could have known the fearsome things that were still to follow. . . .

But Dr. Corvin, as it turned out, was an agreeable man and a persuasive talker. He soon dispelled our disgust and anger with the grave professional charm of his manner. He assured us that the madman was kept in seclusion in a distant wing of the house. The other guests did not even know of his existence. It was only by an oversight of his keeper that he had escaped to confront us.

Corvin told us he had cared for Anstey since his childhood. The young man's case was most unusual, he said; there was nothing physically amiss, and yet Anstey was haunted by a delusion. He was convinced that he was pursued by a demon, in the form of a frail, lovely girl—whose kisses could only be bought with fresh blood!

"THAT accounts for such actions as the one you have just witnessed," the doctor said. "Peter desired to smear himself with the blood of the cat, in or-

der to attract the fair demon to himself, and know the delight of her caresses while she sipped the fresh gore from his skin. And the case is all the more weird, because it tallies curiously with an old legend of the Soledad Indians. . . .

"They tell of a demon, named *Prami* in their language, who haunted this region of mineral springs. She would kiss away the blood of wounded hunters and warriors, who came to bathe in the healing waters. And they would go mad for the sake of her caresses; let their own blood until they wasted away; or kill others in a berserk fit, to wallow in stolen crimson—as bait for the blood-lady. . . ."

Corvin related the story with the art of a born *raconteur*. His description of the springs made us so anxious to explore the region for ourselves, that we had soon dismissed the incident of the madman from our minds. . . .

And then, presently, my cousin Hester rejoined us. "Here you are, Dr. Corvin," she said, gaily. "You found Gordon and Lila Varney before I found you—I thought you might be down at the sulphur pool. . . . Well, now that we're all together, I've a suggestion to make. A few of the other guests are starting off for an afternoon's walk—why don't we all join them? I feel quite vigorous today, for an old lady. . . . There'll be plenty of time before dinner for Lila and Gordon to unpack in their cottage. Right, my dears?"

It was my cousin Hester Varney who had written me to suggest Soledad Springs as a honeymoon retreat—she was a guest here of long standing. It was easy to understand her eagerness to show Lila and me about the place. Corvin looked at us questioningly; and we nodded our consent to the proposal.

And so, in the best of spirits once more, we joined the rest of the hiking party, and started off along a trail that wound into the sunlit hills. . . .

During the course of the outing, the doctor led me up a steep gorge, to show me one of the more inaccessible springs. Lila remained below, in a pleasant dell where the trail crossed the canyon—together with my cousin, and the other guests. Lila and Hester Varney had taken an immediate liking to each other—it was for this reason that I did not hesitate to leave my wife behind, while I followed Corvin up the steep ravine.

The spring we had come to see bubbled up from a cleft in the stained rock. Nourished by the moisture, a clump of maiden-hair fern arched over the orifice.

"Drink, if you're thirsty," Corvin suggested. "This water is quite wholesome, despite the color. The red stain is only some ferrous salt. . . ."

I was quite thirsty, as a matter of fact. The sun was hot, and the climb had been abrupt. But as I knelt by the spring, I shuddered in spite of myself. The crimson color of that mineral water was too damnably convincing. It looked exactly like fresh blood—as if the earth itself were bleeding in great scarlet gouts!

I could not help recalling the horror Lila and I had witnessed earlier, the sight of the maniac ripping apart the helpless kitten. I recalled the doctor's story of Anstey's hallucination—his belief in a wild demon-girl, who lived on warm blood.

My presentiment of evil grew stronger; I was almost prepared for some vision beyond the pale of reason; I think I would not have been surprised if some decayed fragment of human flesh had floated to the surface of the red water I was about to drink—or if the demon Prani herself had appeared out of thin air. . . .

But that presentiment, if such it was, projected itself too far into the future. All too soon, indeed, I was to learn the full ghastliness of mad dreams, and supernatural terror. But the immediate horror, the ugly accident that befell me the very next moment, was quite within the pale

of Nature—and it was strangely enough the thing I least expected. . . .

I forced myself to overcome the foolish disgust I felt at the red color of the water; I was about to drink. And then, at that instant, from the clump of fern that brushed my forehead, I heard a metallic, evil warning buzz!

I realized that I was staring into the cold, topaz eyes of a five-foot rattler, coiled to strike! I froze in horror, while the narrow black ribbon of the creature's tongue curled and quivered between its scaly lips. I tried to draw back; I was not quick enough.

I saw that loathesome mouth open; saw the hooked fangs protruding from the pallid membrane. Then, quicker than the eye could follow, the snake lunged forward; I felt a stab of pain as the rattler sank his fangs deep in the flesh of my cheek.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Surgeon of Death

THE next moment, Corvin, hearing my strangled cry, had leaped to my side. He saw the snake, and crushed the ugly thing to death with the heel of his heavy riding-boot.

Then he was kneeling close to me on the soft green moss. Even in my mortal terror and agony, I could not help admiring the cool and capable efficiency of the man.

"Steady, now, my boy," he said, "I've got an emergency kit in my knapsack for exactly this kind of thing. . . ."

As he spoke, he unstrapped a canvas case; inside this I saw a hypodermic syringe, and a number of vials. Within a minute, he had given me a series of injections in the area of the puncture wounds in my face; and also he had given me an injection in my arm.

I tried to dismiss the matter lightly.

"Lucky you were so close," I said. "I suppose you've killed the poison already—won't even need to say anything to Lila. . . . I'll be all right, won't I, doctor?"

Corvin looked at me gravely. "I'm not going to play make-believe, Varney," he said. "Even with every remedy known to science, the bite of a huge snake like that is a serious thing."

He took my wrist in his hand, and glanced at his watch as he continued to speak. "I'm doing my damndest to pull you through—but you're going to be pretty sick. Better let me handle everything—I'll get you back to the house. The less you try moving, the better. . . ."

Even as he spoke, I could feel my head swelling with pain; it seemed that all the blood in my body was rising to my face, that the very skin would burst with the pressure of it. And at the same time, I felt myself losing consciousness. I was fading away, against every effort of my will, into a dark hell of stifled, voiceless agony. I tried to speak; found I could not utter a sound. After a moment, I slipped away altogether, into hot darkness. . . .

I have a vague memory of a brief interlude, during which I partly returned to my senses.

I think I had been carried back to the dell where Corvin and I had left the rest of the party; I cannot be sure, because I could not move even to the extent of opening my eyes; I could only hear the hubbub of excited voices, dimly, as if from a great distance.

I made out Lila's voice, hushed, breathless with apprehension. "Gordon—oh, my God! It is—is he. . . ? Can you save him, Dr. Corvin?"

Then Corvin's deep tones: "It's a very serious thing, Mrs. Varney. I don't believe in false promises; but you can be sure I'll do my best. . . . Perhaps we can pull him through; but you may as well

know the facts now, as later. Gordon Varney will probably be disfigured for life, if he recovers. The venom of the rattle-snake, especially if it be injected in the region of the face or neck, will often produce serious hemorrhages, that leave a permanent crimson blotching or ulceration upon the tissues. I—I can't tell you how sorry. . . . Perhaps, my dear, you'd better not look at him now. . . ."

But then I felt a cloth being removed from my face; I realized that Corvin must have covered it with a handkerchief or towel. The next instant, I heard Lila's muffled, quiet sob of anguish—a sound that seared my soul more cruelly than the most frantic shriek could have done.

I went out altogether, after that—I knew only blackness.

THE first sense that returned to me, was the sense of *time*. I did not know, at first, who I was, where I was, or anything else. I only knew that time was passing; that I could feel a dull continuity of pain in my head, while time went on and on.

But then, gradually, after weeks of this suspended state, during which I could scarcely distinguish between night and day, between sleep and waking, memory of other things began to come back to me.

I knew I was lying in bed; I knew my head was swathed in bandages. I became aware that I was sometimes fed, sometimes given injections in my arm. I remembered who I was—what had happened. I could open my swollen eyelids, I could see the pleasant room in which I lay, I could hear the birds singing outside the sunlit window.

I was still too weak to move—otherwise I think I might have tried killing myself in some way.

Disfigured—disfigured for life—my face horrible, repulsive, empurpled by the poison of that ugly monster. . . . I remembered the words of Dr. Corvin; and Lila's

muffled gasp of horror as she saw me.

At last, the day came when I was strong enough to speak. When Corvin came into the room, I could see his face light up with satisfaction at the sound of my voice.

"Bravo, my lad," he said. "Fully conscious—you've won the battle. Believe me, this is a happy day—Lila will be overjoyed. She's been thinking of you, praying for you, every moment. I'll call her—I've promised to let her know the minute you could speak. . . ."

He sat down at the bedside. "But first—the bandages—we'll remove the bandages. It's only a matter of time now, till you're up and about."

But I shook my head with bitter determination. Lila should not sacrifice herself to me; I was not going to allow it. "Wait a minute," I said. "You've got to help me, Corvin. I don't want to see Lila. I—I don't want her to see me. . . . I heard you tell her, you know, that day it—happened. . . . I know what my face must be like. You must help me to leave this place—at night—she must never know—never see me again. . . ."

But Corvin, smiling strangely to himself, continued to unwind the bandages that swathed my head. "Now, now," he said. "That's all past and done with. There's nothing to be afraid of, at all. You have no cause to worry. . . ."

At that, a wild, unthought-of hope gleamed in my heart. "You—you mean—I'm *not* disfigured? My face—is the same as always. . . .?"

"Not exactly," Corvin said. "You will find—your face is somewhat different. But I think I can promise you—there is no disfigurement. . . ."

Now the last of the bandages were removed; I could feel the air on the skin of my face for the first time. Curiously, it was not so much my facial muscles as my scalp that seemed to be sore and stiff; and Corvin had unwound the heaviest covering of gauze from the top of my

head. But I gave that scarcely a thought.

The doctor had taken a hand-mirror from the dresser that stood in the room. Eagerly, half-forebodingly, I took the glass in my hand.

What confronted me in the mirror filled me with a mixture of relief and puzzle-ment

The face I saw was not disfigured, certainly; it was if anything distinctly more handsome than the average countenance.

*But it was not my face.*

Instead of dark brown, the hair on this head was blond. There was no mustache on the upper lip; the skin was deeply tanned instead of white, as my skin had always been. This certainly was not I; and yet I knew I had somewhere seen this blond, good-looking young man before.

I was in doubt for a moment; involuntarily, I brought my hand up to feel the contour of my cheek. I could see the hand reflected in the mirror I held.

On one of the fingers, a joint was missing; and from the end of that finger, the bone still protruded, in the center of the healed tissue—like a small, hooked claw. . . .

**F**OR longer than I cared to remember, I had been lying in bed too weak to stir a muscle. Yet, now, under the stress of my bewilderment, and excitement, and horror, I sat bolt upright. The mirror slipped from my shaking fingers, crashed and splintered on the hard floor of tile. . . .

I continued to sit there, rigid in amazement and unbelief at the things Dr. Corvin explained to me. His face was like a granite mask; his intense, pallid eyes were fixed steadily on mine.

As he spoke, I felt the top of my skull with my fingers. There could be no doubt of it—there was a ridge of scar tissue that completely encircled my head—as if the top of my cranium had been lifted off, and then replaced, and the scalp sewed together again. . . .



Peter Anstey's body—healthy, vigorous, unblemished—in spite of the fact that his crazed brain was haunted with unthinkable delusions. . . . My own body—dreadfully marred by the poison of the rattlesnake—even though my brain remained unhurt by the ordeal. . . . It all made sense, in a wild, unearthly fashion—and yet I could not accept the accomplished reality. . . .

"I—I can't believe it," I said hoarsely. "You say you performed the operation only after Lila had given her consent. . . . But I can't believe that Lila would allow such a hellish thing. Any disfigurement—would have been better. I tell you it's devilish witchcraft. . . ."

"Nonsense," Corvin said, firmly but still kindly. "The risk was all against you, I'll admit—though I've done a good deal of experimental brain-surgery on animals in my time, with some remarkable results. But there's no witchcraft involved. You don't realize the alternative, that's all. What I am going to show you will be a shock. I know you're still weak, still excitable—but you must understand the alternative. . . ."

He went to the door; a moment later he returned, followed by the male nurse, Ashburn—the man who had been Peter Anstey's guardian. The servant wheeled before him a steel table on which was some long object shrouded in a white rubberized cloth.

Corvin drew back the rubber sheet; he lifted off a number of damp stained cloths reeking with formaldehyde, so that one end of the long bundle was starkly exposed.

And I gazed at the thing that had once been the head of a man—that had once been—*my own head*. . . . !

Oh, God in Heaven, the horror of it! The sheer, revolting, unnerving horror! Features there still were, recognizable features—lineaments I could recognize as my own. But how can I describe the

loathesome corruption of that flesh—the great swelling on one cheek, still oozing dark blood to mingle with the nauseous moisture of formaldehyde—still bleeding weeks after death? How can I describe the ghastly hemorrhages, the disfigurements, the puffed lips, the half-open, staring eyes? Words are only words; the full revulsion of the sight is something I shall never be able to express, and yet never able to forget as long as I live. . . .

I noticed that the head of that ghastly corpse had been opened; the scalp and the crown of the skull had not even been replaced. But now—even while I shut my eyes to blot out the sight—the thought of that detail filled me with a kind of gratitude. I believe I would have thanked Dr. Corvin, if he had been the devil himself, now that I knew the horror that had been spared me—and Lila. . . .

Strangely enough, I began to feel almost cheerful, once that vile corpse had been wheeled out of the room again. I continued to sit up; I drank a glass of wine that Corvin poured for me as a stimulant. I had forced myself to accept the doctor's seeming miracle as a fact: there could be no doubt of it: *my brain, and with it my consciousness of self, had been transplanted to the sound, healthy body of Peter Anstey*. I suppose the rising elation I felt was nothing more than the return of hope to a mind where only despair had dwelled. . . .

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Hell's Ecstasy*

PRESENTLY, Dr. Corvin ushered in Lila and my cousin Hester. My wife came close to me, smiling timidly. It was a moment before I realized the cause for her hesitation. To her eyes, I was Peter Anstey, whom she had last seen as a hopeless and bloodthirsty lunatic. She knew about the operation, of course—yet there

must still be an inevitable feeling of strangeness, of—almost—revulsion.

But Lila was the same as always—tall, fair of complexion, her pale golden hair in miraculous contrast to the deep blue of her eyes. I felt a sudden urge of wild desire for her cool beauty. It was strangely as if this new body that I inhabited was capable of a fierce conspicuous desire of its own—a lust such as I had never felt before, in my humble adoration of Lila's pure loveliness. I was going to crush her close to me in a violent embrace. . . .

But Corvin shook a finger in warning. "Not too much excitement," he said. "And besides, it isn't fair that Lila should have all the attention. Here's someone else to wish you well. . . ."

My cousin Hester had been standing there smiling; now she came forward and brushed my forehead lightly with her lips.

"Good boy," she murmured. "I knew you'd come through all right. And I do believe you're better looking than ever! Better watch out, Lila. Even old ladies like me can be dangerous competition!"

Hester Varney was only thirty, as a matter of fact; although in appearance she might have been fifty or sixty. Her ability to call herself an old lady was eloquent testimony of the innate charm and good humor of her nature. She could make a joke of a misfortune that would have soured and spoiled most women. She had been a famous actress at twenty; her greatest role had been Peter Pan, the spirit of eternal youth. But then she had suffered from some withering rheumatic fever; and she had dropped from the sight and mind of the public. I myself had not seen or heard from her since I had been a boy in high-school; it had been a great shock to me, on arriving at Soledad, to meet this tiny, grey-haired old lady—instead of the dainty beauty I could dimly remember from my youth. . . .

Yet for all the change in Hester's appearance, her spirit was brave and charm-

ing as always—she was still a great lady. Her words of encouragement meant a great deal to me now, as she took my hand in hers, and pressed it warmly. "You've made it, Gordon," she said. "I told them you would. . . ."

After a short time, Corvin remarked that I was getting too much excitement; I ought to sleep through the remainder of the afternoon. He ushered the two women out of the room, and followed them, and shut the door. . . .

I looked at my surroundings for the first time. I realized that I was in a room at the rear of the doctor's one-story residence. Directly outside the open French window, a sunlit hillside rose, cleft by a mysterious canyon. It was all wild, all natural—the primeval desert left untouched.

The world seemed very beautiful now; I longed to lie still and rest. But I was still under the influence of the wine Corvin had given me as a stimulant; and I was tormented by visions of the restless desire that Lila had awakened in my consciousness. I must have lain there a whole hour, tossing and turning under my covers.

Presently I was seized by an impulse to see myself again; to look long at the face I must grow accustomed to, henceforth, as my own. I felt on the floor at the bedside for the mirror I had dropped earlier, in my agitation. The glass had shattered, of course; but I never thought of that, in the eagerness of the moment. I remembered only after I had gashed my hand on a jagged splinter. . . .

It was not serious, though I was bleeding rather freely. I dropped the glass on the floor again; and for a moment I brought the cut to my lips, to suck away the blood. Then I continued to recline there, watching the trickle of scarlet that oozed from my hand. I thought it would stop bleeding of itself; I did not want to call Dr. Corvin for such a trifle. . . .

I HEARD no approaching footsteps, I am sure of that. When I first caught a glimpse of the apparition, she was standing framed in the French window.

She was a tiny, frail thing—scarcely taller than a child, but graceful with the sinuousness of a woman in full bloom. Her skin was clear, golden, satin-smooth; her hair was raven-black; her eyes were the great lustrous eyes of a wild thing of the wasteland.

She wore a loose garment of some rose-colored, gossamer tissue—hardly a covering, because her slender and yet voluptuous curves were revealed by the gown with greater allure than the direct appeal of nakedness.

For a moment, she stood there, poised, delicate, while I still gazed in astonishment. I felt my lips forming and whispering a single word—a name—a strange barbaric syllable "Prani," I said. "Prani."

I remembered something I had almost completely forgotten: Dr. Corvin's account of the strange demon-girl who had haunted his insane nephew. He had described the apparition; he had mentioned her name. But it almost seemed to me that my lips were pronouncing the word without any volition on the part of my brain; as if it were Peter Anstey who was speaking, instead of Gordon Varney. . . .

I think I had no emotion of any kind, while she advanced lightly into the room; lightly, soundlessly, as if she were not flesh, but a being fashioned out of another, more rare, element. My sensations were too physical to be called emotions; I could feel my heart pounding in my chest; I could feel the blood rushing in my veins.

Perhaps my agitation was something akin to fear, or terrified unbelief, at the beginning. But then, she came very close to me where I lay; I fancied I could feel the warmth of her body, like the glow of desert sunlight; and I was aware of a dusty fragrance that hung about her, like the smell of flowers and desert honey.

Then I knew why my heart was pounding, why my blood was singing and rushing in my head. All the passion I had felt at the sight of Lila, when she had come into the room earlier, was reawakened now, a thousand-fold, by this fragile demon-girl.

Her lips brushed my hand—softly, softly—at the place where I had cut myself: I felt the momentary touch of a thirsty, pulsing tongue. She was like a butterfly sipping nectar—scarlet nectar.

My whole body vibrated and quivered with sympathetic passion at the caress of her mouth.

I lay unmoving, spellbound, while she leaned forward—brought her face close to my own face. I realized that I must have smeared some of the blood from my hand on my lips, when I had sought to staunch the flow. . . .

For a brief instant, her soft, glowing mouth touched mine—in a kiss of such passion as I had never dreamed of before, and should never cease to dream of thereafter.

I tried to hold her—tried to grasp her frail, lovely body in my arms, and crush her to me. But then she uttered a faint musical laugh—no other sound—and whirled away again. There had been only a trace of blood; there was nothing more to attract her. . . .

I HALF rose from the bed where I lay; I was going to pursue her; I forgot that I was an invalid. But she darted light as thistledown across the room and through the window—sprang into the deep canyon that cleft the hill outside—vanished into the heart of the mysterious and eternal desert.

Only now, after she was gone, did I reflect on the thing that had occurred; only now did I give way to consternation.

Dr. Corvin's operation—had the transfer of brain-tissue been incomplete? Did some fragment of Peter Anstey's brain

still fester in his—in my skull, to poison my consciousness with the same insanity that had driven him to sanguine distraction?

Or else—even more ghastly possibility—was it conceivable that Prani was *real*? That such a demon could have actual, physical existence in this world?

Frantic, scarcely knowing what I did, I jangled the hell-cord at the head of my bed.

A moment later, Dr. Corvin hurried into the room.

At the last instant, for some reason I could not analyze, I checked myself from blurting out what had happened—what I had seen. I only muttered something about having cut myself on the broken glass; asked him to bind up the wound.

Then, after the doctor had finished, and gone again, I still lay there, tortured and bewildered by my own thoughts. One fact was becoming increasingly plain to me; one fact I could no longer deny to myself. *Though my mind were in the end split asunder by madness, yet I hoped to see the demon-girl again. Even while I still shuddered in disgust at the memory of her actions, I longed in spite of myself for the caress of Prani's scarlet lips. . . .*

That was the reason I had held my peace; that was the reason I had said nothing to Corvin.

I tried to awaken the pure, fresh image of Lila's beauty in my brain; it was hopeless. I could only feel my lips twisting about one barbaric name: "Prani," I whispered, "Prani, return to me. Prani. . . ."

Soon after that, I must have fallen into an exhausted feverish slumber. . . .

**D**URING the days that followed, I lived through emotions ranging from ecstasy to stark, gibbering despair. As soon as I was alone, I would jab my wrist with a pointed shard I had saved from the broken mirror. . . .

Then Prani would appear at the window—drawn by the fresh blood like a moth to a flower—or like a blue-bottle to the stench of carrion. . . . I tried to think of the one comparison, and I could not quite banish the other from my imagination.

And I would know the mad, hectic delights of her caresses for a moment—all too brief a moment. . . . Then she was gone again; and I was left alone; weak, shaking; and yet still unsatisfied, still tantalized. . . .

I knew this state of affairs could not go on forever: I was slowly dying from the loss of my own blood. Corvin was frankly worried; he was at a loss to account for my decline, after I had shown such amazing improvement. I was growing weak, listless, anaemic. . . .

Lila would come sometimes to see me; and I would fight down the momentary surge of passion that filled me when she came into the room. I treated her coolly, almost indifferently. I was hurt by the look of concern and misery in her eyes—but I was preoccupied with things beyond her simple understanding—beyond the understanding of any other human soul. . . .

And my cousin Hester would visit me, too, of a morning. She owned a little woolly dog named Toto; often she would put him through his tricks to amuse me, while she joked with the gaiety of an old trouper. But I could see that Hester, like Lila, was haunted with worry. . . .

Then, one day, my cousin unwittingly brought things to a head. In all innocence, she left her little dog to keep me company, while she went for an afternoon's walk in the twilight.

I paid no attention to the animal at first, though he gamboled and played and begged with all his energy. I was interested in only one thing—and *that thing I could purchase only with fresh blood.*

But then, as I lay there, listless, despair-

ing. I looked at the small friendly creature once more—with a different meaning in my glance. . . .

It would not have been so dreadful, if Toto's eyes had been less trusting until the very last minute. And yet, though I loathed myself for the gruesome deed, for the sheer bestial horror of it, I was impelled by a power outside myself—by the vision of Prani, the lovely blood-thirsty wraith of the desert. . . .

A moment later, the vision was fulfilled by the reality—or what seemed reality to my wracked, hysterical brain. I whispered aloud, "I love you, Prani—you are more beautiful than life—you are lovely as death itself. . . ."

And then, while the demon stood poised at my side, about to drink the little dog's blood from my quivering flesh—the door opened!

In my anxious and hectic passion I had not thought of this possibility; and now it was too late; Dr. Corvin himself walked into the room.

It was some seconds before the full significance of the situation came home to me. *Corvin obviously did not see the demon-girl, though he was looking full at her.*

Even as I watched, Prani drifted with lewd grace from the room, vanished outside the open window. I could distinctly see the evil smile that curved on her soft lips. . . . But so far as Corvin was concerned, he had simply happened into the room, just as I had finished atrociously murdering the little dog of Hester Varney with my bare hands. In his eyes, I was lying alone in bed; covered with blood and bits of fur; *raving, staring mad. . . .*

"Good Lord," the doctor said, his voice tense with emotion. "You too—the same madness—the same delusion as Peter. . . . Some fragment of diseased brain-tissue I failed to remove—that's it, of course—it's got to be that. A diseased fragment poisoning your healthy brain. . . ."

I implored him, if such were the case, to attempt a second operation—at whatever risk to my life. Death would be better than life on these terms—better a thousand times.

He agreed, finally, to make the attempt; though it would be weeks before I could regain sufficient strength to allow even a faint hope of recovery.

Then he gave me an injection of some sedative to quiet my screaming, raging nerves; and I presently fell into a profound black slumber. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Kiss of Death

**WHEN** I awakened the next morning, I discovered that the window was locked, securely; it was a steel-framed affair, and very strong. And in addition, Ashburn, who had been Anstey's nurse, had moved into the room; henceforth he was to be my constant guard. . . .

As the days went on, my strength returned again; I was given nourishing food, and I had an occasional glass of hearty red wine. I think I might even have regained some serenity of mind, if I could have banished the haunting, enticing memory of the blood lady. . . .

Corvin was willing to allow Lila and Hester to visit me; but I did not want to see them. I was ashamed to face my cousin, after the thing I had done to her innocent pet. And knowing what I was, I preferred not to have Lila come near me. Perhaps some lingering spark of sanity, of decent, sober intelligence still remained in my consciousness. . . .

And still, there was that other component of my being to torment me—the madman, the blood-sick lunatic. . . .

God knows the lunatic was not slow to seize his opportunity, once the opportunity came.

Ashburn had been reading to me, one

warm, quiet afternoon. With the window shut, as usual, the room was close and the air was drowsy. I was half-dozing, when I realized that the man's voice was beginning to falter as he read. I watched out of the corner of my eye; I could see his head nod, and the magazine slip from his drooping fingers.

Every day recently, I had been sitting up a little; walking about the room. Corvin himself had said my strength was quite normal again. . . .

Silent as a cat, I slid out of bed—tiptoed around the sleeping form of the nurse. On the dresser was a heavy silver candlestick. I grasped this in my hand; whirled swiftly, struck once. . . .

The man crumpled silently to the floor; but I did not even give him a second thought. I was past caring about the most callous brutality. I had only one object, one desire. Prani—the deadly, the lovely, the lascivious Prani. . . .

The locked window—that was my immediate thought. I must open the window, so she could come into the room. I took Ashburn's key-ring; but there was no key to fit the lock on the steel casement. For a moment I was undecided; then it occurred to me that I might find my way outside, if I could not let the blood lady in. . . . I soon found a key to open the hall door.

I stepped into a bare corridor; there were several doors set in the walls, all closed. I did not know where they led, because I had never been through this wing of Corvin's big, wide-spread house.

One after another, I tried the knobs; softly, with the exaggerated fiendish cunning of a maniac. Four panels refused to budge: locked. . . .

With bated, hushed breath. I tried the remaining door. It swung open before me without a sound.

I stood on the threshold of a pleasant room, a woman's room—Lila's room! Lila, my wife: the slender, lovely girl

whose cool beauty I adored above all other things. . . .

She was seated before an open window, bowed as if silently weeping. I forgot everything else, in a sudden wave of remorse and tenderness. I remembered my neglect of her during these last days—how I had refused even to see her. . . .

She started when she saw me. "Gordon," she whispered. "Gordon—but I don't understand. The doctor—he said you were very ill. . . . Said you couldn't be disturbed. . . ."

But she gave herself to my embrace, freely; through all her puzzlement, her lovely smile shone, like a gleam of moonlight in the darkness. . . .

**H**OWEVER, this tenderness endured only a moment. As I felt the delicious grace of her body close to my flesh, it seemed that I had suddenly become another person again. I had briefly returned to the personality of Gordon Varney; but now the blood-mad and lustful maniac, Peter Anstey, was in the ascendancy once more.

As soon as Lila was aware of this new flood of crude passion, she pulled away from me, in disgust and terror.

Her unwillingness only drove me the more frantic; cruelly, avidly, I crushed her to me; ripped the clothing ruthlessly from her body, so that her lovely rounded breasts were shamefully exposed; pawed her with the bestial passion of a savage, instead of the humble adoration of a loving husband. . . .

I could see her glance fixed upon my hand, my right hand. She was looking at that one finger with the final joint missing, with the sharp, hooked claw of bone projecting from the scarred flesh.

She screamed in shrill terror and revulsion; and at the same time I raked her white breast with the cruel snag of bone, so the red blood started and welled from the scratch.

And then, at the sight of that blood, another thought crept insidiously into my fiery and appalling delirium. It was no longer Lila's beauty that excited my passions; suddenly the thought of another beauty, more willing, because it was utterly base, returned to me. Prani—whose kisses were purchased—with fresh blood. . . .

Something, deep down in my awareness, under all the insane strife of my desires, told me that my new temptation was the final passport to chaos, to mania, to the eternal kingdom of Hell.

Once I had given way to that temptation, I knew that all hope would be a thing of the past. And yet, inexorably, I could watch my fingers tightening about my wife's delicate throat—crushing the breath from her lungs, until her eyes closed, and she wilted in my grasp. I had only one purpose—to kill her, and then tear open her body, and smear myself with her warm blood. . . .

*To attract the blood-maiden, Prani, with a surfeit of Lila's fresh blood, and to know the pinnacles of evil passion in her embrace. . . .*

I was at the very point of committing that final horror: my teeth were set to tear at the soft flesh of Lila's still body—when I heard a sound behind me; or perhaps it was only that I felt some instinctive awareness of another presence. I glanced over my shoulder. . . .

There, framed in the doorway, stood Dr. Corvin himself!

It never occurred to me to wonder why the man had made no move to save Lila from my attack—why he continued to stand there with a sardonic smile twisting his face. . . .

My only thought was to complete the evil act I had begun; and I saw in Corvin a possible hindrance. I let Lila's body sink limp to the floor, and I whirled to face him, a sort of animal snarl bubbling in my throat.

Now, indeed after I had become aware of his presence, he stepped forward. I saw that he was armed with a heavy sand-bag, of the type used to subdue the violently insane without cracking their skulls. But he had underestimated the violence of my insanity by far. . . .

He swung the sand-bag to meet my charge; but I evaded the blow, cat-like, and snatched the weapon from his grip and flung it aside. The next moment we were grappling bare-handed.

He was a powerful man, broad and solid, though he was much older than I. Perhaps he would have been more than my match, ordinarily. But now, I had all the strength of wild, hysterical mania. I could feel my fingers grasping the muscular column of his throat; I battered his skull against the door-jamb, until his whole head was an unrecognizable pulp of blood and bone and brain-tissue. I laughed aloud, peal after insane peal, like the call of a loon over a grey desolate swamp, or the gibbering of a hyena in the stinking murk of a jungle night. . . .

**M**ORE set than ever on my unspeakable design, I was going to return to the still body of Lila. But then I heard a voice with a worried ring calling from the corridor; and a moment later, my cousin Hester appeared in the door.

I watched her eyes widen and her mouth open. Then I heard the shrill dagger of sound that was her scream.

I sprang at her; but she eluded my grasp, and dashed down the hall again like a shadow. That tiny, withered grey woman was quicker than I had dreamed she could be. . . .

I was after her, with one thought uppermost in my brain—she must be silenced, so I could return to the consummation of my diabolical love—the vampire love I longed to buy with the blood of my dead wife. . . . Afterward, they could kill me, for all I cared; but nothing should stop

me now. Nothing could stand in my way.

Hester ran fast; but I pursued her to the edge of the warm sulphur swimming pool, which was located between the doctor's house and the guest-cottages. There was no one about; as usual on a hot afternoon, the guests had retired to sleep or read before dinner.

Hester Varney gave a strangled cry, as I cornered her at the brink of the cloudy, steaming pool; but there was no one to hear.

At the last moment, she leaped into the pungent sulphur bath; and struggled across to the other side. But I dived after her, and seized her foot as she was clambering out, and dragged her back into the shallow water. She fought wildly, but I shook and worried her like a beast of prey, crazy to kill.

I grinned down at her terror-stricken countenance with a kind of idiotic death-lust. I held her before me, helpless; and I looked her full in the face. . . .

And then—then came the most appalling, unbelievable moment—the hideous climax to everything that had occurred!

The woman I held fast in my grip was Prani herself! *Hester Varney was the blood lady!*

That was the beginning of my return to sanity. For that I had been, not to see through the disguise before this! Hester Varney was a skilled actress, of course; she knew I had not seen her for ten years. She was easily able to age her face with grease-paint, to powder her raven hair, and to assume the twisted gait of a rheumatic patient. But she was still a young woman in years, and she had been able to assume the role of the dainty Prani with equal ease. . . .

Now she was a bedraggled, almost ludicrous demon, to be sure—the streaked hair clinging about her face, the heavy make-up streaming from her features. . . . There was no longer much glamour about her after this discovery.

I dragged my cousin into one of the dressing-rooms that adjoined the pool; I did not want to be seen and disturbed by anyone until I had forced her into a full confession. She talked readily enough, now that she saw there was no hope of continuing the deception. It was an amazing story that she told—a tale of fantastic treachery, devilish ingenuity, unbelievable ferocity. . . .

Some months ago, Corvin's nephew, Peter Anstey, had developed a dangerous heart-disease, in addition to the murderous insanity from which he had actually suffered since birth. This circumstance threatened poverty to the doctor and Hester Varney—who had been secretly married for years. Although Soledad Springs still attracted a few guests, it was no longer a profitable venture. Corvin's chief income was derived from a trust fund in his nephew's behalf, that would cease in the event of the boy's death.

One day, they found a picture of me among Hester's belongings: they noticed my distinct resemblance to young Anstey. That was the inspiration of the whole murderous scheme. The news of my marriage furnished a pretext to write, suggesting the Springs for a honeymoon trip; and once Lila and I had arrived, the rest was easy.

**T**HE rattlesnake that bit me was real enough—but rendered harmless by the extraction of its poison glands. Still living, it had been tethered with a piece of wire behind the clump of fern, beforehand. It was Corvin's first-aid hypodermic that knocked me out, however—his needle containing some powerful opiate!

Afterward, that fiend smeared my face with red and purple grease-paint, which he had concealed in his knapsack; and Lila, horrified at the sight, was willing to consent to anything, to save me from ghastly disfigurement.

An operation there actually was—but



only a minor plastic surgery. Hair bleached—skin tanned under a sun-lamp—moustache removed—finger cut away: it was easy to make my already distinct resemblance to Austey into a perfect likeness.

They had coolly murdered the pitiful lunatic, meanwhile; he would soon have died in any case. His corpse, altered to look like mine (which was made simpler by the necessity of disfiguring my face) was wheeled into my room. . . .

The rest is sufficiently plain to the imagination. I was kept drugged with aphrodisiacs; I was easily deluded by Hester in her impersonation of the blood lady. . . .

The final goal, of course, was to destroy my reason. As Peter Austey, mad, but possessed of sound health, I would be likely to live on for years. I would be a permanent source of money for Corvin and Hester; the trustees of the madman's estate would never suspect their devilish treachery. . . .

Those two human vultures had actually planned that I should murder my wife. In that final act of horror, what remained of my reason would crumble; and at the same time, Lila would be disposed of. Corvin had already planned a fake suicide; he meant to take Lila's body, and throw it over a nearby cliff, to be dashed on the sharp rocks below. What could be more plausible than this—that the widow of Gordon Varney should kill herself in a seizure of grief? (My death, of course, had already been reported to the authorities, as due to natural causes.)

One final revolting detail there was—one final treachery. The servant, Ashburn,

was of course, a party to the scheme; but Corvin and Hester wanted to be rid of him, as a possible witness against them. They had drugged him, to make him fall asleep by my bedside—hoping I would kill him in my insane effort to escape. . . .

When Hester had finished this astounding recital of cruelty and duplicity, I stood up, still grasping her slender wrist in my hand. She might be Prani, the blood lady, the delicate and beautiful demon—but I was released forever from her prurient spell.

She gazed at me in terror. "All right," she gasped. "You win. Gordon Varney. I've told you everything—I swear it. . . . What are you going to do?"

"Don't worry," I grated. "I'm not going to kill you on the spot, as I'd like to do, God knows. I've shed enough blood already, on your account. But you're going to take your medicine for this devilry. I wouldn't care about what you've done to me—but Lila—Lila. . . ." My voice half-choked with a bitter sob. "Do you realize—what I've done to her. . . ?"

I started back in the direction of Corvin's house, dragging Hester after me. "The police will know what to do with you, after they get here," I told her. "I'm turning you over to them, if it's my last act on earth. After that—I don't care. It doesn't matter what happens to me. . . ."

ONCE in the house again, I pushed the cringing and whining creature who had been my charming cousin—who had been the lovely sprite, Prani—into an empty closet. I closed the door, and locked it unceremoniously.

Then, I went to the telephone, and called



the police in the town of Soledad Junction, a few miles down the road from the resort.

I had scarcely finished the call, when I heard a footstep in the same room. I whirled—staggered where I stood.

Lila—Lila, my darling, my beloved wife. . . .

She was standing there, pale and shaken—but certainly alive—certainly real and substantial!

Couldn't be possible? Had I only choked her to unconsciousness, in my brutal passion of madness? Had she revived—had she been restored to me again?

"My darling," I whispered. I started forward. But then I paused, thinking she

would cringe, run from me, after what I had done to her. I thought bitterly that I could not blame her if she refused even to look at me again. I was painfully conscious of my likeness to Peter Anstey, the diabolical result of Corvin's plastic surgery.

But Lila did not run away. "Gordon," she said slowly. "Gordon—oh, you've come back to me—thank God, thank God. . . ."

It was not until that moment that I was aware of my reflection in a mirror that hung close by on the wall. I saw then what had happened: my hair had darkened noticeably; I had lost the strongest element of my resemblance to the maniac.



The sulphur pool, of course: I had often heard of sulphur as an agent for darkening hair. I had plunged in after Hester, and the chemical in the water had restored a great measure of its natural coloring to my hair. . . .

The next moment, disregarding the fact that I was still drenched to the skin, Lila was in my arms. Her face was close to mine; she gazed seriously and steadfastly into my eyes. Only after a long interval—her lips curved, and I saw once more her wonderful smile, the loveliest smile in the world, . . .

There is not much else to tell. I had explained everything to Lila by the time the police arrived. Hester was ready to repeat her confession, in hopes of receiving some measure of clemency from the law. Also it turned out that the man Ashburn was not dead; he recovered later from the effects of severe concussion.

His story, in corroboration of Hester's,

clinched the evidence without doubt. In court, I was absolved from any blame in connection with the death of Corvin; as the judge remarked, I deserved a legal commendation for the act, if I deserved anything. . . .

Lila and I have since tried to forget the ghastly events at Soledad Springs; it has not been too difficult, in our happiness together. My moustache has grown out again; I am without any question Gordon Varney, and not Peter Anstey. There is only one small reminder of those horrible weeks on the desert, that honeymoon in Hell that we spent at Soledad Springs. One joint of a finger on my right hand is missing.

The projecting claw of bone, that Corvin allowed to remain after his beastly operation, is altogether removed. But even yet, when Lila and I are alone together, I am careful to keep my right hand out of the field of her vision. . . .

#### THE END



the mysteries that the police give up as hopeless. There was the time Dot thought she had discovered the identity of the human monster whose fiendish ingenuity enabled him to instantaneously destroy any who opposed him. In the old mansion on the lonely, forgotten tip of Manhattan Island, Dot faced death in its most bizarre and horrible form—and the only man who could help her was trapped in a ghastly fire which left its victims *covered with ice!* . . . Also in the same issue is THE RAG DOLL KILLER, a tense novelette by Edith and Ejler Jacobson, whose hero is the most vulnerable detective in the world . . . plus THE CHIMES OF DEATH, a long novelette of eerie mystery by Russell Gray, and other stories and novelettes by your favorite authors!

#### THE CASE OF THE FROZEN CORPSES

Ray Cummings gives us a mid-winter festa of death in THE CASE OF THE FROZEN CORPSES and introduces a new firm of private detectives that is fore-ordained to take its place among the most popular that DIME MYSTERY has ever presented. George Roberts and his intuitive sister, Dot, like nothing so much as to get into trouble; they specialize in solving

**DIME**  
**MYSTERY**  
**MAGAZINE**

January Issue On Sale December 9!



# Parade of the Tiny Killers

A Novelette by  
NAT SCHACHNER



*Was Valentine Frazer, the man the whole town laughed at the year before, responsible for the plague that turned Centerville into a shambles of blood and horror? Or was it true that the curse of death had been placed on that evil stone idol Frazer had stolen from the temple in darkest Africa—the idol that came to hideous life and crushed women to a pulp in its basalt arms? . . .*



*They Came From the Heart of Africa to Sow the Seeds of Damnation in the Peaceful American Village*

CHAPTER ONE

The Death God

IT WAS the strangest parade Centerville had ever seen. Even before it started, there had been a few voices raised in protest; partly because of distrust of the man in whose honor it was being given, and partly because of an intangible uneasiness over rumors that had been set afloat, no one knew how.

Nevertheless, the parade was already under way.

I stood at the corner of Lincoln and Grand watching it, with a protective arm around Peggy Whitman to shield her from the pressing crowds. The sidewalks were black with people, and the perspir-

ing police, few in number, were hard put to it to keep them from spilling over onto the line of march. Lincoln Avenue was bedecked with flags. The stores flaunted streamers and gay bunting. Clerks and stenographers leaned from the windows of adjacent office buildings in a gay holiday mood. It should have been a great homecoming for Valentine Frazer, to make up for the mockery and laughter that had greeted him on his former return from the unknown sectors of Africa.

But it wasn't.

I said to Peggy, as the first escort of mounted police pranced their horses slowly up Lincoln Avenue. "Listen to the crowd go wild, darling. They're making up for their former disbelief. Frazer's brought the goods back with him this

time—the new race of pigmies he discovered, the strange idol they worship, and everything that he claimed he had seen.”

She did not answer; but within the tight circle of my arm I felt her slim form grow rigid. I stared down at her lovely face. Her clear grey eyes, the piquant curve of her chin, her curly crop of sunny hair, always did things to my insides. I still could hardly believe that Peggy Whitman, ace feature writer of the *Daily Argus*, and most desirable of Centerville's younger set, had agreed to marry a struggling young lawyer like myself, Jerry Doane by name.

Just now, however, her eyes were troubled, and her cheeks, in spite of a hot July sun, were queerly pale. I felt my fist clenching unconsciously and my jaw growing rigid.

“Look, sweet,” I said. “You really don't believe that Frazer threatened you because of those articles you wrote last year making fun of his claims?”

She kept her eyes carefully averted from me; watched the parade. The civic organizations were marching past. As yet, Valentine Frazer and his weird trophies had not started from the carefully guarded pier down at the Basin.

“Morgan Greenway told me Frazer swore he'd make everyone suffer who had laughed at him.”

“Morgan Greenway,” I replied angrily, “is an ass, and a rival explorer to boot. He's jealous that Frazer found this idol-worshipping tribe in a territory that he himself was supposed to have covered thoroughly several years before. It was because of his denials that you wrote those articles linking Frazer with Dr. Cook and all the other fake explorers.” I patted her hand comfortingly. “Anyhow, honey, I'll take care of Frazer if he starts anything with you.”

Peggy smiled back at me wanly. “I know you would, Jerry,” she said, with

the sublime confidence of a girl in love, “if Frazer's threats were ordinary ones. But you've heard the rumors about those awful pigmies, and that idol he carted back with him.”

“Publicity stuff!” I told her. “A swell build-up by Jimmy Rean for his circus. He's paying Frazer heavy to exhibit the tribe and their idol, you know.”

**Y**ET, in spite of my blustering talk, I couldn't help feeling uneasy. I had spoken only that morning to Dwight Ewing, curator of the Centerville Museum, about those horrifying rumors that were floating about town. He had not laughed. In fact, he had turned pale. A haunted expression came into his face. “I've heard about them. Mr. Doane,” he said seriously, “and they're no laughing matter. There had been talk for many years among anthropologists and explorers about a strange tribe of pigmies who lurked in the fastnesses of the Devil-Devil Mountains in the heart of the Tanganyika Territory. Queer tales of their hideous practices, of the strange idol they worship that walks like a man and kills like a devil. Even the fierce Zulus never dared penetrate their territory. And those few white men who went in never came out, or were found, hideously crippled, hopelessly insane, babbling of little captured children who were changed before their eyes into age-old pigmies, wolfing human flesh in honor of their terrible idol.”

Ewing had stopped short with a conscience-stricken air. “Don't let this go any further, Mr. Doane,” he said earnestly. “You know how easily a panic can start. I hadn't really believed these stories myself. That was why when Frazer came to me last year with his wild tale of what he had seen, and asked that the Museum back an expedition for him into the land of the pigmies, I refused.” The curator smiled a bit bitterly. “Of course there were other reasons for refusing.

Our funds are pretty scanty; until today, no one in Centerville would be aroused to an anthropological research. My own salary is barely above the starvation level. In any event, Frazer got pretty sore—he took Greenway's taunts and Miss Whitman's satiric articles in bad part. And he called me names. Where he got his funds from, or how he managed to persuade or force these pigmies to return with him to the United States, I do not know. There was supposed to be a curse upon their idol, that would blast whole nations if it was ever removed from its temple."

The crowd around me surged forward eagerly. I barely managed to hold Peggy from being swept into the street. Necka craned down the wide thoroughfare.

"Here they come!" someone in the crowd shouted.

The doors of the covered pier had been thrown open. A number of long, sleek Packards, with open tonneaus, moved slowly through. The mob that surged around the Basin let out a roar of welcome.

Then the roar died.

"What happened?" gasped Peggy. She tried to stand on tiptoe, to look over the heads of those around us. I am rather tall, so I could see pretty easily.

I gripped the girl's arm. "I think," I said rapidly, "we had better get out of this. It's too hot and crowded to watch a silly parade."

Peggy twisted within my hand. Her grey eyes looked steadily up at mine. "Jerry Doane," she said, "I am not a fool. You forget I'm a pretty good reporter. *What* is happening down there that suddenly caused the crowd to stop cheering?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "It's too far to see exactly. But the people on the sidewalks seem to be crowding back, to be scattering into the side streets. Even the police are going."

IT was true—and unbelievable. I had never seen a parade crowd act like this before. There were four automobiles in the feature cavalcade. One that housed Valentine Frazer, the triumphant explorer, half submerged in flowers and floral wreaths. The second with a single motionless figure propped up on the back seat; its features a mere frozen blur from where I stood. Then two cars, side by side, crowded with dark little creatures, mere bobbing dolls in the distance.

As the four autos moved up Lincoln Avenue, something strange was happening. A wave of cheers rolled out before them from the crowded spectators. But the greetings died abruptly as the procession came abreast. Even this far away I could detect the sudden shift in psychology, could almost hear the swift, short intakes of breath of the onlookers. The cheers froze on their lips; those who had pressed closer to the street line for a better view were the first to shrink back.

They had passed Anderson Park by now; were only two blocks away from where we stood. The figures in the autos were quite visible and distinct in every lineament. A red-faced man next me started to cheer: "Hurray for Frazer!" Some others in the rear took up the cry.

Then it died.

The red-faced man jerked his head forward. The color fled from his jowls. "My God!" he said hoarsely. A young woman in the very forefront, with a child clutched tight in her arms, began to push backward. Her lips twitched with a strange fear. "Let me out!" she implored. "Let me out!"

Valentine Frazer was abreast of us now. He lolled in the back seat of his car, half submerged by floral wreaths. He was a tall, bony man with piercing black eyes. His skin, drawn tight over high cheek bones, was burnt by tropic suns to a dirty brown. His thin, straight lips were a bloodless gash.

But there was no answering welcome in his gaze to the first scattered cheers. His sunken eyes surveyed the swaying mob with curious little prickling fires; his lips seemed to press tighter with the memory of former wrongs. Frazer was not the man to forget the derision with which he had been greeted once before.

Slowly his head turned toward where we stood. His eyes flicked over me with a stiffening frown, fixed upon the girl who stood at my side. The banked fires flared. The black pupils seemed to distend.

"Oh!" Peggy exclaimed faintly. "I—I think, Jerry, we'd better go."

I felt the corded muscles swell under my jaw. "Hero or no hero," I growled, "I'll knock his head off if he looks at you like that."

But already his car had moved slowly ahead, and the next came into line. I stared, and forgot Valentine Frazer and his sullen hate; forgot everything but the strange sense of overwhelming horror that rooted my limbs.

Up ahead, the bands were still playing brisk march tunes, but here they seemed curiously far away. We had descended abruptly into the pit, into a savage world where Evil ruled and unbridled lust and obscene passions held full sway.

A burly policeman stopped his interminable shoving at the spilling crowd. His eyes popped. "Mother of God!" he ejaculated.

The idol was propped up between cushions. In size it was about that of a man, and it sat with long black arms motionless on black knees. It was carved from black basalt, and its hard, polished surface seemed to quench the burning rays of the July sun. The head was a gargoyle of ugliness. Red ochre and white clay daubed its frozen face into a fantastic grimace. A leer of the abysmal brute hovered around its motionless lips.

It was hideous enough in all conscience,

but mere ugliness would not have been sufficient to cast that blighting pall upon those who stared at it aghast. Its head was turned askew, so that to my heated imagination its slitted eyes seemed to bore directly into me. I felt a strange impact; my will seemed to flee, my limbs turn to flowing water.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Conference of the Damned

THEN it was over. Life rebounded in my veins. That terrible look had been withdrawn. Was it madness on my part, though, or the dizzying heat of standing in the sun, that made those sunken basalt eyes seem to move in a slow arc and come to rest upon the loveliness of the girl I loved?

She was beautiful enough even to attract the gaze of an idol of stone. The sheer thinness of her dress molded her breasts into delectable roundness, and the whiteness of her uncovered throat made ardent the casual glance.

But I could have sworn the basalt eyes had moved; I could have sworn that a strange, fierce lust had colored those black, recessive depths. Peggy cowered against me. I could feel the softness of her body shaking with terror.

"It—it's staring at me as if it were alive!" she whispered brokenly. "Jerry, I'm afraid!"

I firmed my grip on her, shook off the strange dread that had encompassed my own limbs. "Nonsense!" I said loudly. "It's an illusion—a trick of the sun and shadows. How can a thing of stone be alive?"

The procession halted suddenly. Up ahead there was a traffic intersection. The car that held the idol had come to a stop a little beyond us. The two remaining cars had stopped as well. Each swarmed with half a dozen tiny folk.



Once, at a World's Fair, there had been on exhibition a whole village of the pigmy people of Africa. I had examined them with interest; but that was all. They were human beings; small in size, it is true, but with human lineaments and friendly enough.

But these pigmies whom Frazer had brought to Centerville were different. No human beings could have sent that vivid horror pulsating through my body. I flatter myself that I am a sane, common-sense young man, with steady enough nerves. A lawyer can't afford to be subject to delusions.

Yet somehow, these tiny creatures, not more than three or four feet in height, inspired me with unutterable loathing. It was not merely the pitchy darkness of their skins, nor the twisted savagery of their faces. It was something else. Their eyes, for example. They glared at us with incredible hate; but they were not black, as are those of all negro tribes. Instead, there were blue, and slate grey, and brown flecked with yellow; as if they were the incongruous eyes of white men, startlingly set in alien masks.

White men, did I say? Boys rather, young lads in their teens. It was that last touch which added sheer horror. Aged and twisted with centuries though they seemed, underneath I sensed a queer childish agony—a desperation of young white souls helpless against the obscene molds into which they had been cast.

How long we stood that way I do not know. How long the procession paused I have no present knowledge. Paralysis had gripped the crowd, held it motionless in the contemplation of those baleful figures.

Someone brushed past me; squirmed out into the roadway like an eel. Unknowing, my eyes followed him. It was a little boy, not over ten, his sharp young face glowing with the thrill of a parade, of sights never before witnessed.

I recognized the lad. He was Billy

Saunders, the only child of poor old Widow Saunders. Everyone in town knew her, and the boy who was all that remained to her of hope and joy in the world.

"Billy," I called sharply. "Come back!"

But the little fellow did not hear me. He wanted to see the strange idol and the pigmy folk. Poor lad! His mother would never be able to raise the dollar admission to view them at close range the following evening in Rean's Circus.

He raced out into the road, right up to the auto in which the basalt idol sat stiffly. He clambered onto the running board, heedless of the hoarse shout of Coogan, the cop; of my own sudden cry.

"The little imp!" I grunted; dropped Peggy's arm, and started out after him.

My foot had not cleared the curb when the boy screamed. It was an ear-piercing scream, such as a young calf makes when the butcher's knife is laid to its throat. His twitching young form jerked back off the running board, fell to the hard pavement in a huddled sprawl.

But even as I raced for him, and Peggy's cry rose above the startled yells of the mob, two things happened.

The traffic light ahead had changed to green, and the procession started forward again.

And little Billy Saunders had sprung to his feet, was running wildly down the block as fast as little feet could carry him, his childish treble echoing a frightened refrain. "It's alive! It's alive!"

AT six that evening a group of us sat tensely in Mayor Lovett's office. George Lovett was uncomfortable. His eyes never lifted from the burnt-out cigarette in his flabby fingers.

"Mr. Mayor," snapped Morgan Greenway, the explorer, glaring across the table at his rival with vindictive eyes, "you've got to stop Frazer's show. And what's more, you'll give orders to have those fake

pigmies of his rounded up and placed where they'll do no more harm."

An animal-like snarl came from between Frazer's tight-held lips. He started up.

But burly Jimmy Rean, who sat next to him, thrust him back in his chair with a flick of his huge hand. His broad red face did not change its expression. A thick black cigar bobbed between his lips as he spoke. "Mr. Greenway is jealous because he didn't find the pigmy tribe," he said. "I don't blame him for that. But when he tries to ruin my circus, that's another matter. I've got a contract with Mr. Frazer to show his natives and that idol of theirs tomorrow night. The Big Tent is a sellout. If the Mayor of Centerville or any blue-nosed busybody like Greenway tries to stop us, or passes cracks again about fakes, there'll be trouble pronto."

George Lovett looked at me miserably. I acted as counsel for the town on occasion.

I cleared my throat; tried not to look at Peggy. She was sitting at the farther end of the table, her notebook open before her. She was covering the conference for the *Daily Argus*. But she had been curiously listless throughout the proceedings. The open page was still bare of pothooks. Ever since the parade there had been a strange dread clouding her eyes.

"I'm afraid Mr. Rean is right," I said. "There is no real evidence connecting Frazer's pigmies with the death of Billy Saunders, the disappearance of the other two little boys, or the horrible mutilation of that girl who was found in Jones' Alley. If you stopped the circus, you'd be subject to heavy damages, Mr. Mayor."

Greenway flung violently to his feet. "All right," he shouted. "Let Frazer and his gang continue their reign of terror. No evidence, hey? Didn't Billy Saunders yell things about the idol as he ran screaming down the street? Didn't they find him dead, without a mark on him, two hours

later in the vacant lot near the Basin?"

His pale eyes gleamed; his sallow skin burned with a hectic flush. "Mark my words. Before this night's over you'll have such a shambles in Centerville that you'll go down on your knees and pray God to forgive you for not having taken my advice. That idol has a curse on it. Frazer stole it from the Devil-Devil Mountains. It will bring a plague of deaths wherever it is. But he never found its pigmy worshippers."

He spun on the explorer, shook his fist at him. "Those pigmies of yours are boys—white boys whom you kidnapped, and changed into evil changelings with certain witch-doctors' drugs that you found in Africa. You're working a racket. Rean backed your expedition in return for an agreement to exploit your finds. You couldn't get the pigmies, so you're manufacturing them. But they've broken loose—the drugs have twisted those poor little children into fiends. They're killing on their own now. And you need more victims to take the place of those who escaped. That's why two more boys disappeared today."

He spun on his heel, darted out of the office before anyone could speak. Behind him there was a moment's silence. Peggy swayed forward; almost slumped over her notebook. Her face was the color of ashes.

A RED mist swam before my eyes. My heart missed a beat; then pounded furiously. I remembered Billy Saunders' frightful scream as he almost touched the idol. I remembered the strange sensation I had when I first saw those pigmies. There had been two deaths in the last five hours, and two boys of ten missing. Ten! The same age as Billy! The same heights as Frazer's little folk!

Dwight Ewing, Curator of the Museum, broke the hushed spell that had followed Greenway's outburst. He was a medium-

built man, with the contemplative eyes of a scholar, pince-nez, and a little grey goatcc. He was a well-known archacologist, and had been himself to Africa on expeditions for the Museum.

He took off his glasses, surveyed Frazer with precise deliberation. "Those are—uh—rather serious charges, Mr. Frazer," he said. "What have you to say about them?"

Valentine Frazer came slowly to his feet. I had noticed earlier a frightened look in his eyes. But now it was veiled under a hell of fury. "Damn you all," he snarled. "You and Greenway and the rest of them are trying to blast my reputation. It wasn't enough that you made a mockery of me the first time I came back from Tanganyike; you're trying to ruin me again. I'll—"

Jimmy Rean lifted from his chair. For a big man he moved fast. His hand shot out, caught the raging explorer in a grip of steel. "Shut up, you fool!" he said in even tones. He faced the rest of us. "We'll do our talking in court," he announced. "Greenway will pay through the nose for what he said; so will anyone else who spreads his nonsense." He glanced meaningfully at Ewing, stared past me with calm insolence at Peggy.

I jumped up. "You leave Miss Whitman out of this, do you hear?" I said heatedly.

Rean looked at me with assumed surprise. "I haven't even mentioned her name," he countered. "But naturally, if she would be thinking of writing any more little articles, like those of last year—"

He left an implied threat hanging in the air. He opened the door of the Mayor's office with one hand, propelled Frazer before him with the other.

A cold wind gushed through me. I had an eerie feeling that there would be no courtroom trials; that some of us who had been in the Mayor's office were doomed to die before another night had passed. But even this strange psychic warning of

mine did not begin to encompass the full horrible truth. . . .

I took Peggy in my car to the Argus Building. She insisted on that against all my pleas. As we parked in front of the clanking newspaper plant, I tried again. I held her tight in my arms, smelling the subtle perfume of her warm body, feeling the delicious softness of her bosom pressed against my heart.

"Darling," I begged. "Please let me take you home; let me drive you over to Winchester, out of this altogether. If you write up what you heard in Lovett's office, your life will be in terrible danger." I shuddered. "Remember what that Talley girl looked like when they found her this afternoon."

She clung to me with a sort of desperation, but her voice was steady. "I am a reporter, Jerry. The *Argus* depends on me for its spot news. It is my duty to write the story."

"But—" I started to argue.

She disengaged herself gently from my arms. "Suppose," she said, "you were defending a client. Suppose you were threatened with death if you went on with the case. What would you do?"

I opened the door of the car. My hand shook with age. "You're right, sweet, as always," I said dully. "But tomorrow morning I'm calling for you early."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Where Satan Walks

I LIVE on the outskirts of Centerville, not far from the Basin. An arm of the sea comes up almost to my door, and at night I can hear the splash of the waves and smell the good salt air. But tonight I lay in a sleep of drugged exhaustion, hearing nothing, feeling nothing. Mrs. Hanson, my housekeeper, had taken the night off to visit some relatives. I was alone.

A faint, insistent burr pervaded my consciousness. I rolled in bed, tried to shake it off. But it grew louder, louder, until I awoke with a start, hands clenched, trembling in every limb.

Someone had his finger on the door bell and was holding it there. Voices shouted my name loudly, urgently; peremptory knuckles slammed against the door. They made enough noise to wake the dead. I bounded out of bed, all sleep fled from my eyes. Somehow, sickeningly, I knew what was the matter. Slipping on a bathrobe, slippers, I ran to the door, turned the lock. Men tumbled in, their faces white in the moonlight, guns glinting in their hands.

"What the hell—" I started.

"Get into your clothes quick, Doane," gasped Jimmy Rean, the circus man. His big red fist cradled a sawed-off shotgun; his florid complexion was pasty white. "We're forming a posse."

I felt little things crawl under my skin. I gripped the door jamb for support. "Is it Peggy?" I managed.

Other faces tumbled behind him, each in the grip of an awful fear. Men I knew—Mayor Lovett, Greenway, Dwight Ewing, Hal Martin the garage man, Sam Smith who ran the haberdashery, others. But not Valentine Frazer!

Ewing pushed forward. His little grey goatee was askew. His eyes blinked rapidly behind his glasses, as though trying to hold back unmanly tears. The big Colt in his slender fingers shook.

"Who knows, nian!" he exclaimed. "It's not only one girl; it's everybody."

Hal Martin's face was a thing of stone. "They got my Paula—"

The flat unemotionalism of his voice was more terrible than any grief.

"Damn 'ern!" screamed Sam suddenly. "Little Jacky is gone! If those devils—" Then he began to sob; great dry sobs that tore at the throat.

I was flinging clothes upon myself. I barely heard them. It was selfish, I admit, but a great fear was churning my insides. Peggy, the girl I loved more than life, than honor, than the whole darn universe together, had gone home alone last night; was alone in the old Whitman house across the flats. Her parents had gone to Winchester for the week-end, and Mamie, their servant, never stayed in Saturday nights.

"But who—what?" I gasped as I laced my shoes, ran to my dresser, and pulled out the police automatic I kept for emergencies.

Rean groaned. "I take everything back that I said. It's Frazer's pigmies. I thought I had them locked in safe for the night in our pay car. But my watchman, making his rounds at midnight, found the door smashed open, and all those little devils gone."

Greenway's sallow countenance flared with a curious triumph. "And tell them the rest, Rean; that your great Valentine Frazer has gone with them," he rasped.

"I wouldn't be too ready to blame Frazer," Ewing broke in mildly. "Perhaps they killed him first. You never can tell what he did to them to force them to leave their native land and come here to be shown off like freaks."

"Why don't you tell him everything?" said Hal Martin dully. Only his eyes showed the terrible madness that lay underneath his frozen mask. "It wasn't no pigmies got my Paula. I saw him bending over her body." He swallowed air in a huge gulp. "It was that—that idol—a-walking like a man. I saw him clear as day."

"NOW look here," Ewing said. "Your excitement must have blurred your vision. After all, we're intelligent people. We're not superstitious savages in the heart of Africa. An idol, a thing of stone, no matter how cunningly carved to re-

semble a living creature, cannot walk; cannot rip open a human body the way your Paula was."

Greenway whirled on the circus man. "Did you check up on that idol before you raised the alarm, Rean?" Again, in all my patient horror, I noted that strained eagerness in his voice.

The big man bent his head. He seemed crushed. "Yes," he admitted with a certain husky effort. "We had the stone image in our strong room. We found the door smashed out—and it was made of steel—as though a battering ram had struck it." He raised his head with a frightened look. "There was something else I didn't tell any of you before. The door to the pay car was smashed in—not out, the same way."

A half-hysterical laugh tore from my lips, though God knows I did not feel like laughing. They stared at me in amazement. "This is too much," I cried. "Ewing is right. We're not savages with darkened minds to believe such truck. Those obscene little devils are responsible for this; and Frazer is—"

I stopped short. We were out on the porch now. I flung the door shut behind me, and ran down the steps.

A girl had screamed, once; a sharp cry of unutterable fear. Even as we stood, frozen in our tracks, she screamed again. This time there was madness in it; agony beyond all endurance.

As though our heads were animated by a single jerking cord, they swung in the direction of that awful cry.

The marsh grass grew thick along the edge of the Flats. It was tall, coarse grass, high enough to conceal a man in its rank vegetation. But directly in front of the waving fronds, barely a hundred yards from where we stood, I saw something that chilled the marrow in my bones.

A ghastly black image stood like a Colossus in the sodden ground, its stony feet widespread, its red and white painted

face of basalt glimmering in the moonlight. Lust seemed to dart from those carven eyes, to pulse like a flame through the lava-hardness of its countenance.

Its black, jointed arms were wide, stiff. Within their crushing grasp, struggling furiously, beating with small, bruised fists against the stony chest, was a girl! Capering around the idol and its prey, clapping its hands in obscene glee, venting unintelligible cries, danced a little creature out of hell. A pigmy, not over three and a half feet tall, its weazened, sooty face screwed up into an infernal mask, its lank, black hair falling in coarse strings around its childish head.

"Peggy!" I cried out in a great voice.

The girl's head turned feebly at my cry. The white moonlight etched the awful terror in her eyes, the bloody streak across her cheek.

"Jerry!" she screamed. "Help! I'm being crushed! It's stone! It's—"

But already I had jackknifed from the porch, was slamming forward as fast as terrorized limbs could carry me. I forgot the gun in my hand; couldn't have used it even if I remembered it. How could I avoid hitting Peggy, whose cries were growing fainter, whose struggles were becoming feebler?

Behind me, however, I heard two shots in rapid succession. I swear I heard the sharp spang of a bullet upon the stony surface of the idol's thigh. The graven image did not even stagger. He swung around, faced me as I ran. To my crazed senses it seemed that a hideous grin distorted his craven lips, his ochre-splashed head of basalt.

The pigmy, however, as the second bullet cracked, screeched horribly. He stopped his capering dance, jerked howling into the tall grass that swallowed up his puny form as though it were a crawling insect.

Not fifty yards separated me from the idol and Peggy. Her cries had ceased;

she hung limp and unmoving within those terrible arms. I put on extra speed. "I'm coming, Peggy!" I yelled.

The idol surveyed me deliberately; its stony face terrible in its frozen immobility. Then, without hurry, in ponderous fashion, it turned, stalked into the marsh grass, still holding the girl against its rigid bosom.

I pulled up my gun as I ran; sent a stream of steel-tipped pellets flaming into the night. I heard the dull, plunking sounds as they hit. It was such a sound as comes when bullets flatten themselves against hard rock.

But the idol moved on without a stagger, straight into the tangle of weeds. Just as I slammed to the place where he had stood a few moments before, he had vanished. Not even the waving of the high tops of the grass betrayed where he had gone.

**F**EET pounded behind me. The posse ran up to where I was, came to a halt on the very edge of the marsh. "God!" moaned Rean, his thick lips twitching. "I was sure you hit him several times."

"I did," I answered. "The slugs took no effect."

Sam Smith's eyes burned with a savage light. "I got that little devil, though," he chuckled wildly. "He can't travel far with a thirty-eight in his guts. I'll blast everyone of 'em down until I find my—my boy."

I started into the grass.

"Hey! Where're you going, Doane?" Greenway cried in alarm.

"After that thing of stone," I said, "and Peggy. Follow me, men."

Greenway shrank back. "Not me," he muttered. "Not for a million bucks. It's come to life, just as the curse said it would. It'll make mincemeat of us all."

"Me, neither!" shrieked Mayor Lovett, his round little eyes protruding.

"Then I'm going alone," I called back.

Peggy was in the power of a monstrous thing, and those cowards would let her die the way the other girls had died. I had seen the body of Jane Talley. She had been crushed out of all recognition to a human being. Every bone in her slender form had been broken almost to powder, as though it had been squeezed in a terrible vise. Only her head had remained intact.

I slogged on, grimly, desperately, through oozing ground and black muck, seeking that which I dreaded to find.

Through the muffling grass I heard Rean's bull roar. "We're cowards, lads, and we know it. Only Jerry Doane has the guts to go in after him. The least we can do is to scatter along the edge of the swamp, in case the idol ducks out. I'll take the left hand side; Mr. Mayor, you take the right. Split up into two parties."

Then all voices died; and I was alone in a sea of vegetation that towered high above my head. Despair gripped my vitals; despair, and a dreadful fear. My own life no longer mattered, but I must find Peggy before I died.

It was dark in there. The thin rays of the moon barely filtered through the tangle. My feet sucked in deeper and deeper; the stench of rotting vegetation and crushed salt filled my nostrils. But still I went doggedly ahead; sacking, seeking, hearing no sounds but the distant lap of waves; all sense of direction lost.

Then I stumbled over something yielding. My heart raced; died to a chilled whisper. Wildly I parted the heavy grass, stared down at the form that lay face up in the black ooze.

My first sensation was one of overwhelming relief. It was not Peggy. My second was one of savage gladness. The body was tiny, and the black muck half-covered its face. Then I stooped quickly, a new and more gruesome fear displacing all else. With the sleeve of my coat I wiped desperately at those little features.

I cried out then and answering yells sounded close at hand. Without knowing it, I had stumbled in a circle through the tall marsh grass; had come to a point close to where I had entered.

"Good Heavens!" shouted Ewing, as he thrashed to my side. Then he stared down at my find. "The pigmy that Sam Smith shot," he said, startled.

I shook my head as the other members of the posse pushed their way through. "No," I said. "It is not the pigmy."

Just then Sam stumbled heavily in. "I knew I killed the damned little beast," he crowed. "He'll never catch any other little boys to—"

I tried to get between him and the body; but he was too quick for me. A sudden hush fell upon the crowding men. It was a terrible thing.

There, lying in the swamp ooze, his face barely cleansed by my sleeve, was little Jacky Smith, Sam's only child. A round bullet hole showed dark in his chest, the edges discolored with muck and black water.

The flame of triumph ebbed slowly from Sam's face. A bewildered expression took its place.

Then, with a frightful cry, he fell on his knees in the mud, flung his arms passionately around the poor little body. "Jacky! Jacky! It can't be you! It can't—"

He jerked to his feet, still cradling his son. He glared around at us with mounting madness in his eyes. "You saw me, fellows," he mumbled pathetically. "You saw me shoot the pigmy. I didn't shoot Jacky. God, I couldn't have!"

We averted our eyes; a strange dread throbbled in our veins. We couldn't look at the father.

He searched our blanched faces, seeking some justification; something to take the edge off the verdict. Then, suddenly, he screamed. "I'll never forget that scream as long as I live.

"Jacky!" he screeched. "It was you all

the time. The idol changed you! Yet I tried, and tried . . ." Something burst in his voice. "I killed you! I killed my own son!"

I sprang for him, but it was too late. His eyes held the glare of utter madness in them. With a great final shriek he plunged away, deep into the swamp, toward the flats where the tide was creeping in, swirling around sucking mud and treacherous bars; the body of his dead son hugged close to his chest.

I started to follow; but Ewing caught my arm. "Let him go," he said softly. "It's better that way. He'd never recover from this thing as long as he lived."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Island Fortress

WE plodded back to firm ground, to the open meadow. Mud caked our hands and clothes; water squished from our shoes at every step.

"The tale was true then," Greenway whispered. "I never really believed it. A stone idol that walks like a man; white boys that are changed by some dreadful process into obscene pigmies, to regain their proper form only in death."

"We've got to find Frazer," snarled Dwight Ewing. "He's behind all this. I defended him before, but after what we saw—" It was hard to recognize the soft-spoken scholar and famous archaeologist in this wild man with bloodshot eyes, glasses gone, his clothes a sodden wreck from the marsh gumbo into which he had evidently fallen.

A murmur arose among the others; it swelled to a roar. "That's right," they yelled, brandishing their guns. "Get Frazer! Lynch him! He brought them here. Come on, fellows!"

Led by Rean and Greenway, they ran toward the road, toward their cars that were parked on the side. Like madmen

they tumbled in; starters turned over, exhausts blasted, and they roared off toward town, toward the circus grounds where Frazer had been installed for the night by his backer, Jimmy Rean.

I did not follow. Peggy had been taken from me. Somewhere, within the swamp, or on the tidal flats, she lay dead, her dear body crushed beyond recognition. Perhaps she would never be found.

I had to avenge her; I had to protect those other girls and the little boys from the fate that had overtaken Peggy and Jacky and a dozen other victims.

The posse, with true mob psychology, had fled in relief from the incredible; was seeking some human fiend upon which to glut its vengeance. Instinctively, however, I knew that the answers lay somewhere in the swamp, or perhaps . . .

I had seen what seemed to be the supernatural. I had seen an idol of stone walk like a man, seize its prey with stiff, hard gestures. I had seen a pigmy from the depths of Africa turn incredibly into a little boy whom I had known all his life in Centerville. I had seen girls crushed to death as no mortal arms could have done; yet still I disbelieved all the testimony of my senses, sought for some other explanation for these horrors.

Frazer? He was obvious, of course. He had brought the strange pigmies and their terrible idol back with him from Africa. He hated Centerville, in spite of his present accolade; and he had threatened Peggy for the articles she had written in derision the year before.

Greenway? He was a fanatic, capable of anything. His professional pride had been hurt by Frazer's discoveries in territory he had claimed as his own. Certainly he detested Frazer; would do anything to discredit him.

Jimmy Rean? Seemingly he was doomed to lose a lot by what was taking place. But who knew? Suppose he was double-crossing Frazer, making him the

goat to force him out of a share in the profits. Later on, when things blew over, the tribe and the idol would be worth a fortune to a canny showman. No tent, no matter how big, could begin to accommodate the hordes of morbid curiosity-seekers.

Even Dwight Ewing, Curator of the Museum, and Mayor Lovett, did not avoid my suspicion. The former had been in Africa himself, knew the legends of the Devil-Devil Mountains; the latter had been under a cloud for some time. There was talk of an investigation into certain city contracts. If the people's minds could be distracted. . . .

I whirled suddenly in my tracks. Some sixth sense had sent its prickling warning down my spine. But I was too late.

I had not seen the little men writhe snakelike through the coarse grass of the swamp. I had not seen them lift with a sudden rush until they were upon me. Knives glittered in their weazened hands, a strange madness blazed in their eyes.

I shot once, but the bullet went wild. A knife point jabbed my elbow, diverted my aim. Then I went down under a horde of flailing bodies, like a giant Gulliver among Lilliputians. I tried to fight back, but there was amazing strength in them, and their knives cut and slashed until I felt no more.

**W**ATER filled my lungs; it clogged my mouth and nostrils with saline bitterness. Instinctively I kicked out with hands and feet. The darkness in my brain lightened; I felt myself rush upward; then I was gasping and choking and spewing out great mouthfuls of ocean.

I thanked God that I was a good swimmer, or I would have died then and there. I was weak from a dozen knife cuts; much blood had gushed from my battered body before I had been thrown into the bay for dead. The tide had turned, was going out to sea again like a mill-race.



Yet I managed to keep afloat until the cold green water revived me and I knew what I was doing. I shook the spray out of my eyes, tried to get my bearings. The moon had set, and only the stars gave me feeble light. I took hasty stock.

The tide was running strong, and the nearer shore was at least a mile away. I'd never be able, in my weakened condition, to buck the terrible current. That meant I'd be swept out to sea. Which meant—

In the darkness I heard the hurried sound of oarlocks. Hope flared in me again. I opened my mouth to shout for help; gulped back the unuttered words, and submerged shallowly to keep from view.

The rowboat had silhouetted a moment against the feeble starshine; and in it, rowing like mad, their faces distorted by the shadows, were Jimmy Rean and Valentine Frazer!

Even as I dived, I noted also the rope that trailed in the water from the stern of the boat. It was my last chance for life—though my own life meant but little to me with Peggy dead—and to penetrate the secret of the horror that had invaded Centerville.

For now suspicion had flared to certainty in my brain. Jimmy Rean had pretended to go with the posse to seek out Frazer as the instigator of the reign of terror; yet here he was, in the company of Frazer, hurrying to some unknown destination together.

With a last supreme effort I caught at the dangling end; held tight though it seemed more than I could do. I dared not lift my head above the waves, except to gulp in occasional hasty drafts of air.

They rowed ahead in great haste, bucking the tide, hitting out on an angle toward the farther shore. I tried to listen to their low speech, but the whip of the waves, the creaking of the oarlocks, and the need I had to keep submerged, made

the words an indistinguishable drone.

After ten minutes of being dragged along like a captured fish, something dark and somber loomed ahead. The boat swerved, made for it.

For the first time I realized where the precious pair were heading. Something that was not the chill of the water froze the blood in my veins. Almost I cut loose to take my chances with wind and tide; then courage came to me; and I gripped all the more desperately.

Fort Armstrong had long been abandoned by the government—and forgotten by us in the town. It stood on a low island at the outlet of the bay, inhabited for years only by gulls and crying curlews that sounded like lost souls in torment. The bastions were half-disintegrated by the ceaseless waves, and the guns that once had frowned from the embrasures lay on their sides, rusted and useless.

During the Civil War the fort had been used to house prisoners of war, and every fisherman, every longshoreman in Centerville, devoutly believed that the bloody ghosts of the men who had died in its dungeons still walked the battlements. No reward could induce one of them to land upon the accursed island. The less superstitious in town also gave the sinister fort a wide berth; it was rumored that smugglers made the ruins a base for their forays.

Just as the boat swung high on a wave, I let go. Swimming desperately, I managed to fling myself on shore, exhausted, spent, in time to see the two men beach their boat, lift it out of reach of the surf, and disappear stealthily into the night.

I lay on the sand a few moments, panting, catching my wind, and giving them a chance to get out of earshot. Then I rose silently, and followed them. I had no doubt but that here, in the fetid dungeons of the old fort, I would find the secret lair of the pigmies and their idol.

The scum-covered wall of the battlements came to within a few feet of the water. Warily I followed its looming granite to the left—where Rean and Frazer had vanished into the darkness. About fifty feet on, an embrasure yawned. I came to it. As I did, two figures, their height exaggerated in the blanketing dark, rose suddenly above me. I flung up my hand in time to break the blow that was aimed at my skull. But its crushing force battered me to earth, left me dazed and unable to move. A hoarse chuckle filtered through my whirling senses. I had walked straight into a trap. They had seen me follow; had waited here for me to come up. Then they had jumped me.

**F**OUL-SMELLING water trickled down my back. A noise of drums and barbarous singing enveloped me. My head seemed slashed with many knives. Slowly awareness came to me. Then full consciousness flooded every fiber of my aching being as my eyes opened on the incredible scene.

I was sagging, half upright, my swollen limbs encircled with rusty leg irons and green-verdigrised handcuffs of an older day. They held me against the damp slime of a dungeon wall, deep within the bowels of the earth. I was a chained and helpless prisoner where generations before, men had died without hope, without mercy.

But I had no time for thought of myself. All my horrified senses were concentrated on what was taking place before me. Light flared in the rock-hewn chamber; light from a fire of bleached jetsan that sputtered and cast eerie shadows on the walls.

Around the fire, leaping and gesticulating in wild dance, were the pignies from the Devil-Devil Mountains. They looked more like demons than like human beings. Their savage, distorted countenances were daubed with plastered mud. Their tiny

bodies, naked except for a filthy breechcloth, were startlingly childish in every immature line. But more than everything else, their eyes held me—blue and brown and greyish yellow—the eyes of white men, or boys!

My eyes lifted past them; my heart shuddered to a halt. Against the farther wall, enshrined in strange shadows, was the idol. It sat stiff-legged on a fallen rock, its black basaltic arms outstretched in sinister anticipation. Its stony eyes leered at me with a strange contemplation; its polished body shone in the leaping glare of the fire.

Something died in me then. Somehow I had held a tiny doubt about that idol. I had refused to permit the truth to penetrate my brain, for fear that I might go mad. But now, at close range, there could be no mistake. This obscene creature whom the pignies worshipped, whose stony arms crushed tender flesh to death within their grinding power, was no mere clever mask, donned by a human monster. It was in truth a creature of stone, a hideous image carved out of primordial rock, a basilisk infused with an obscene life of its own.

On either side of the awful thing, frightened, trembling in every pitiful limb, were two little boys. White boys; youngsters whom I knew. Bobby Green and Lonny Thomas. Boys who had vanished from their beds that night, and left no trace of their going to their frantic parents.

Their little cheeks were stained with tears, their childish voices were lifted in shrill cries for mercy. But each was held in the grip of a pigny, and their cries were drowned by the drums of the dancing devils.

Even as I tried to part my own puffed lips, to cry out, their captors swung suddenly on them. Shiny needles flashed in their weazened little hands. The steel plunged into the shuddering arms of their victims. At once the blubbing tears

ceased; the two little boys grew rigid; a change crept over their pudgy cheeks, swept horribly into their eyes.

Was it my imagination, or the trick of the reddish blaze, or did I actually see a swift transformation, a cunning savagery that transmuted their countenances, that made them obscene companions of the leaping pigmies who shouted and gesticulated with uncontrollable glee?

It all happened so fast that my brain, racked with grief and the sheer terror of it all, had no chance to grasp the thing entire before the two new-seeming pigmies were dragged brutally from the chamber, into a fetid passageway that led God knew where.

Still numbed with what I had seen, still too dazed to do more than sag limply in my rusted irons, I barely realized what had happened, or the sudden hush that had fallen on the circling little beasts.

Then I was galvanized upright; a great wind cleared away the mists that had befouled my mind; a gasp of utter incredulity leaped from my stiffened lips.

Through the same passageway into which the little boys had been dragged, there now emerged two figures. One was all in black, its features hooded with a muffing cowl of red. But the other, half-led, half-pulled along the cruel stones, was—Peggy Whitman!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Death's Little Children*

PEGGY'S tender feet scraped over the pointed rocks, and blood made an indelible trail behind. Her sunny hair fell in a cloud around her terrified face. Her limbs writhed in the iron grip of the shrouded creature.

"Please!" she gasped. "Haven't you glutted your vengeance enough on me? Please let me go. I swear I'll never say another word about your expeditions.

I'll—" She saw me then, and her eyes widened.

"Jerry!" she screamed; even as I gasped out her name. "Help! Save me!"

But her captor dragged her roughly into the center of the leaping pigmies, close to the fire, close to the still-motionless figure of the idol.

"Your lover can't save you!" he jeered within the hollow of his hood. "No one can save the bride of Nba! Long has he waited for such a sweet morsel of flesh as you. See how eagerly he awaits his blushing bride; how he rises to consummate the ecstasy of his union with you. If I didn't fear his wrath, and the fury of his worshipers who expect eternal good luck from your marriage, I'd keep you for myself."

There was no mistaking the lust that gleamed through the slits that hid his eyes. There was no mistaking the sudden silence that fell upon the Devil-Devil tribe. I, myself, in spite of the horrible fate that awaited us both, felt a hot flush rise through my body at the luscious charms of the girl I loved.

The red flames played eagerly over every inch of her shrinking form, revealing every sweet secret to savage lust. Her perfect breasts, tender and soft; the smooth shapeliness of her thighs; the white gleam of each rounded curve; were enough to seduce the saintliest anchorite.

Then the silence was suddenly broken. The idol, its basalt face terrible in daubed white and ochre, lumbered stiffly to its feet. To the ponderous accompaniment of stone on stone, it clanked with queer, stiff-legged strides toward the fainting girl. Its sculptured arms reached out to seize its bride!

I yelled; I cursed; I hurled myself at the irons that held me fast to the slimy wall. No one paid any attention to me. The black pigmies had prostrated themselves with unintelligible cries upon the ground at the sight of their god, Nba, who

walked like a man. The masked figure chuckled hoarsely.

He caught up the frantic girl in his arms, swung her struggling body aloft, deposited it within the crook of those terrible extended hands.

The elbows flexed. A frightful scream broke from the girl's lips. There was a sickening sound of flesh crunching against hard stone. This was the ghastly marriage—the crushing of soft flesh and tender bones against the stony bosom of the god!

Madness seized upon me at that cry; insanity gave me a strength beyond my own. I leaped forward against handcuffs and leg irons. I did not even feel the cruel bite that scared flesh from the bone. I crashed again in berserk rage.

The irons were old, and eaten through by the rust of years. The granite wall was corroded by the ceaseless drip of foul sea water. Something gave.

With a wild yell that rivalled the savagery of a lion's roar I catapulted forward. The pigmies scrambled to their feet with startled cries. The masked man whirled in alarm.

I smashed through the burning drift-wood, scattering the blazing embers, leaped for that thing of black stone that was crushing with horrible strength the life out of the girl I loved.

I hit his body with every ounce of muscle and momentum.

Grinding pains ripped through every fiber of my being. Great lights exploded in my skull. My flesh collided with terrific force against unyielding hardness.

I fell back, moaning sharply with the fierce agony of that crash. My shoulder, where I had hit the basalt idol, snapped with a sickening wrench.

But the god, Nba, had not even staggered at my terrible attack.

**T**HE next instant the pigmies, maddened at my sacrilegious assault upon the god they worshipped, had flung them-

selves upon me. Knives flashed in their hands. I groaned, tried feebly to defend myself.

I felt them cut deep into my flesh; bestial faces glared into my own; childish black arms raised to drive home the finishing blow. Above the roar and tumult I heard the savage voice of the shrouded man, urging them on to the kill; I heard the wilder and wilder shrieks of Peggy as those terrible arms crushed her closer and closer in the bridal embrace.

A keen blade had searched my side with a slashing thrust; dimly above me I saw a hate-distorted face, deadly steel that was poised at my heart. I tried to avoid the shining death, but a horde of small figures pinned me down, helpless. Suddenly it came!

Then the chamber suddenly echoed with crashing sound. The pigmy screeched, fell sideways. The lethal weapon clattered from his hand.

I heaved upward at the respite, scattering the howling little demons as though they were chaff. The red-hooded figure snarled out terrible oaths; his hand whipped underneath his black robe. But I was upon him like a thunderbolt. My fist caught square on his hidden face. With a strangled cry he fell, face forward, into the glowing bed of embers. His garments burst into flame.

I saw only faintly the men who had come through the passageway that led to the outer island; I barely heard the guns that cracked again and again. I saw only the idol, Nba, slowly crushing the girl I loved within his arms.

I snatched up a heavy iron bar that lay near the wall. Whirling it, I darted for him.

Above the wild uproar that filled the chamber, the screams of the scattering pigmies, the howls of the hooded man as he tried feebly to crawl out of the fiery bed into which I had cast him, the smack of bullets, I heard the strange, unintelligible

sound that issued from the god.

His basalt hands dropped to his side. Peggy fell with a dull thud to the ground. We whirled ungainly, ran stiff-legged toward the passageway. I threw the iron bar. It caught him in the small of the back. He staggered a bit; but he ran on. A steel slug smashed into his thigh; yet it did not stop him.

I did not follow. I caught Peggy up in my arms, mumbling endearing words. She opened her pain-swept eyes, smiled. "Thank you, Jerry." Then she fainted.

Two men raced over to me, smoking guns still in their hands. The last pigmy lay twitching on the floor. The rest had fled for safety after their god.

"Lucky we got here in time," growled Jimmy Rean, his eyes popping. "I had the devil's own job sneaking Frazer away from the mob that was howling for his blood. These little devils, after they broke out, had tied him up and thrown him into an abandoned shed on the circus lot. Lucky he knew their language. He heard enough of their jabbering to track them down here with me."

Valentine Frazer grinned sheepishly. "I should never have trusted them. They came back to the United States with me willingly enough. They seemed pretty docile—without the drugs they used in their native mountains to hop themselves up with when they started their blasphemous idol-worship."

"But who then was responsible?" I managed to gasp.

Rean's face hardened. He walked over to the still smoking figure of the hooded man, ripped away the red mask. Underneath, blackened with fire, but still alive, was the once scholarly features of Dwight Ewing, Curator of the Museum and famous archaeologist!

HE stared up at us with insane eyes. "I hate you all," he mouthed with difficulty. "I hate every smug citizen of

Centerville. They gave me an empty post of honor, but they paid me starvation wages. I watched the rest of you wallow in the luxuries you did not need; while I, by far your mental superior, had to count every penny. I wanted to lead expeditions to Africa, to achieve fame and fortune; but not a one of you would back me. Instead, you backed Frazer, and he stole from me the glories that were rightfully my own."

His breathed wheezed. He was dying fast. His voice was becoming fainter. "When Frazer brought back the Devil-Devil tribe, I saw my chance for revenge against him, against you all; and also to get the money you had denied me all my life. I knew the pigmy language; on a former trip I had obtained a supply of the drug that they required to whip them up to their sacrificial rites. Frazer had refused it to them.

"I sneaked into their cabin down at the boat, and made a deal with them. In return for the precious drug, they were to do my bidding. I had them create a reign of terror; I had their god, Nba, kill young girls in terrible fashion; I had them kidnap the small sons of the rich men in town. I threatened to turn them into pigmies if large sums were not paid over at once. The fact that this particular tribe has eyes like those of the white race lent itself to my scheme. I killed Billy Saunders because I thought he had discovered the secret of Nba. After Sam Smith found his son in the swamp, every other father in town would have given me everything he had to avoid a similar fate for his own child."

"But wasn't it Sam's youngster that he shot?"

A horrible grin puffed up Ewing's scorched countenance. "He actually shot one of the pigmies. But Jacky had made a break for it earlier in the night, and to stop him I had to kill him. While pre-

*(Continued on page 108)*

## TERROR TALES

(Continued from page 107)

tending to search the swamp, I dragged out the dead body of the pigmy, dumped it into the sea, and replaced it with that of Jacky where I knew you would stumble over it. Actually, all I did was inject some of the drug into the boys I still held captive to make them temporarily mad. Its effect wears off in a few days."

His grin widened. It was a dreadful grin. "Nba!" he started, "Nba was—"

Bright blood bubbled to his lips. His burnt countenance glared up at us; fell back. He would speak no more.

"I think," said Frazer slowly, "that the idol was hollow. I think that the pigmy witch-doctor, whom I had along, knew the secret of its mechanism. He could have inserted himself into the hollow stone, and worked its stone hands and legs by means of levers. Back in Tanganyika he was a power among the superstitious savages; he alone controlled the god that walked like a man. Obviously he and Ewing were accomplices."

It may have been so. There is no way of telling. For those of the pigmies who escaped had fallen into the sea, and were drowned. The swift tide carried their bodies far out. Only a few were ever recovered.

But Nba, the idol of stone, disappeared completely. Had he fallen into the sea, he should have sunk into the shallow offshore surf. But no amount of dredging or dragging of the bottom ever brought his obscene form to light.

Years after, a returned explorer from Tanganyika mentioned something about a basalt idol that walked like a man, and was worshipped as a god in the recesses of the mountains. He had seen it once, and barely escaped with his life.

His description of it tallied exactly with that of the stone monster that had been in Centerville in that terrible time of which Peggy and I, now happily married, never speak.

THE END

## GUARANTEED TIRES!

GOODYEAR-GOODRICH  
FIRESTONE·U.S. and  
Other Standard Makes

FREE!  
LANTERN  
With Every  
2 Tires ordered



**World's Lowest  
TIRE PRICES**  
Tire users by the  
thousands all over  
the U.S.A. vouch for  
the Long Haul Service  
of our Standard  
Brand tires recon-  
ditioned with high grade  
materials and latest  
methods by our tire  
experts. Our 21  
years experience  
makes it possible to  
offer tires at lowest prices, with legal  
agreement to replace at 1/2 price any  
tire that fails to give 12,000 Miles Service.



Complete with batteries and newest type automatic lamp. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Use wherever. Order now.

### EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!

BALLOON TIRES		REGULAR CORD TIRES	
Size	Price	Size	Price
29x4.40-21	\$2.15	29x4.40-21	\$2.15
29x4.40-20	2.35	29x4.40-20	2.35
29x4.40-21	2.45	29x4.40-21	2.45
29x4.75-20	2.55	29x4.75-20	2.55
29x4.75-19	2.65	29x4.75-19	2.65
29x4.75-18	2.75	29x4.75-18	2.75
29x4.75-17	2.85	29x4.75-17	2.85
29x4.75-16	2.95	29x4.75-16	2.95
29x4.75-15	3.05	29x4.75-15	3.05
29x4.75-14	3.15	29x4.75-14	3.15
29x4.75-13	3.25	29x4.75-13	3.25
29x4.75-12	3.35	29x4.75-12	3.35
29x4.75-11	3.45	29x4.75-11	3.45
29x4.75-10	3.55	29x4.75-10	3.55
29x4.75-9	3.65	29x4.75-9	3.65
29x4.75-8	3.75	29x4.75-8	3.75
29x4.75-7	3.85	29x4.75-7	3.85
29x4.75-6	3.95	29x4.75-6	3.95
29x4.75-5	4.05	29x4.75-5	4.05
29x4.75-4	4.15	29x4.75-4	4.15
29x4.75-3	4.25	29x4.75-3	4.25
29x4.75-2	4.35	29x4.75-2	4.35
29x4.75-1	4.45	29x4.75-1	4.45

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES		TRUCK BALLOON TIRES	
Size	Price	Size	Price
30x6.00-20	\$5.00	30x6.00-20	\$5.00
30x6.00-19	5.20	30x6.00-19	5.20
30x6.00-18	5.40	30x6.00-18	5.40
30x6.00-17	5.60	30x6.00-17	5.60
30x6.00-16	5.80	30x6.00-16	5.80
30x6.00-15	6.00	30x6.00-15	6.00
30x6.00-14	6.20	30x6.00-14	6.20
30x6.00-13	6.40	30x6.00-13	6.40
30x6.00-12	6.60	30x6.00-12	6.60
30x6.00-11	6.80	30x6.00-11	6.80
30x6.00-10	7.00	30x6.00-10	7.00
30x6.00-9	7.20	30x6.00-9	7.20
30x6.00-8	7.40	30x6.00-8	7.40
30x6.00-7	7.60	30x6.00-7	7.60
30x6.00-6	7.80	30x6.00-6	7.80
30x6.00-5	8.00	30x6.00-5	8.00
30x6.00-4	8.20	30x6.00-4	8.20
30x6.00-3	8.40	30x6.00-3	8.40
30x6.00-2	8.60	30x6.00-2	8.60
30x6.00-1	8.80	30x6.00-1	8.80

SEND ONLY \$1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. (\$3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct \$ per cost if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we must submit balance of if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW - GUARANTEED!

**PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.**  
2322-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. 1570-A, Chicago, Ill.

### High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work - prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied - Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry. Don't let your education be capped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-149, Drexel at 55th, Chicago

### WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS

For Immediate Consideration . . . Send Poems to COLUMBIAN MUSIC PUBLISHERS, LTD., Dept. 14, TORONTO, CAN.

### SCALY SKIN TROUBLE PSORIASIS

Use DERMOL. Thousands do for scaly spots on body or scalp. Sold by Liggett's and Walgreen Drug Stores. Trial bottle DERMOL FREE. Write Today. No obligation. LAKE LABORATORIES, Dept. J-1, Detroit, Mich.

### NEW TYPE CHEAP OIL BURNER

WHY COOK OR HEAT WITH COAL or WOOD

Quick heat at turn of valve - hotter, no dirt, ashes or draggery. Burns cheap oil new - no clogging up.

SENT ON TRIAL Prove its efficiency, convenience, and economical operation. Write for FREE BURNER Offer to demonstrate who will demonstrate and take orders. Wonderful money-maker. Write quick - postal card will do.

UNITED FACTORIES, A-752 Factory Building, Kansas City, Mo.

### I WANT MEN

FORDS GIVEN

TEA AND COFFEE ROUTES PAVING UP TO \$1000 IN WEEK

National company needs more men at once to make regular calls on local routes. No experience needed. Operate on our capital. I give producers brand-new Ford cars as bonus. Rush name on postcard for FREE facts.

ALBERT MILLS  
9218 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

# BLACK CHAPEL

IT WAS a time of great happenings in the current world, but Dr. Timothy Howard, curator of the Municipal Museum of New York City, explorer and anthropologist, was only remotely interested in his own time and generation. At seven o'clock on a brisk Tuesday morning, having breakfasted early, he was in the brightly lit basement laboratory of his Rockland County home, intently putting the last touches to the Cro-Magnon group he was going to exhibit in the museum when the west wing was completed.

A west wind rose and died in the hills beyond Dr. Howard's house, and in the house itself, there was a sound of anguish more desolate than the wind.

"Hush, Estabel," Dr. Timothy Howard murmured pleadingly to the dim figure suspended before him. A series of pulleys held the girl's bandage-swathed body in a taut, unnatural position, while invisible machinery hummed in the distance. A low moan of unbearable agony escaped from the girl's white lips.

"Don't you understand, Estabel?" Dr. Howard continued, in a low, almost whining voice. "Only a matter of hours—most important." He had explained before to his specimens that they must cooperate, that he could not hope to succeed without their help.

A despairing sigh from the white lips, as though the girl had given up all hope of mercy. The body jerked momentarily against the wrapping—and was still . . .

Life had fled from the girl, not in the insidious lingering fashion Dr. Howard had intended, but in the old-fashioned way, forever, so that within five days, the woman would be a rotting skeleton.

"Dear me!" said Dr. Howard. He was quite upset. Only a month now, to finish the exhibits for the west wing in the mu-

(Continued on page 110)

**CAN YOU AFFORD  
SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT?**



**YOU RECEIVE \$7,500.00**  
Accumulated benefits for ACCIDENTAL DEATH

**\$7,500.00**  
Accumulated benefits for LOSS OF HANDS, FEET OR EYES

**\$25** Per Week for SICKNESS

**\$25** Per Week for ACCIDENT

**\$25** Per Week for HOSPITAL

**\$100** EMERGENCY ALLOWANCE

**COST TO YOU ONLY \$1 PER MONTH**

**THE POLICY OF THE CENTURY**

**WILL PAY YOUR BILLS!**

The Federal Life and Casualty Company, a legal fire and insurance company of which has paid millions of dollars in policy holders, offers you the new "CENTURY" Policy. This company is not an association or subscription company. It is reliable. It is approved by state insurance departments. Be safe! Costs only \$1 per month. Just mail coupon.

**INSURES MEN AND WOMEN**

The new "Century" Sickness and Accident Policy insures both men and women with the benefits shown, plus many other liberal features outlined in the policy.

**NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION**

ADDS NO BULK—ages 18 and 70 can apply. No medical examination. NO agent will call.

**SEND NO MONEY** Remember you do not send one cent —just mail the coupon below. Don't delay —do it today!

**MAIL COUPON FOR COMPLETE DETAILS**

FEDERAL LIFE & CASUALTY COMPANY  
CENTURY POLICY DEPT., INC., SUITE 40-A  
ELGIN TOWER, ELGIN, ILL.

Please send to me at once complete information how to get the "Century" Policy for 7 months' Free Inspection without obligation.

Name.....  
Address.....

**FREE CAMERA AND RADIO CATALOG**

**NEW 1939 100! BARGAINS**

Save money with this big, new buying guide! 30,000 standard buys in Lafayette radios, parts, tubes, amateur equipment, television kits, cameras and photo supplies. Write for FREE copy of Catalog No. 73-3849

**WHOLESALE RADIO SERVICE CO., Inc.**  
100-C SIXTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N. Y.

188 PAGE catalog

**CHANGE YOUR LUCK TO GOOD LUCK!**

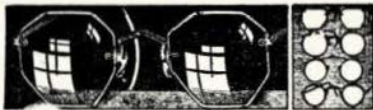
with a guaranteed genuine "4 LEAF CLOVER." You'll never want to be without it. Get one for your sweetheart or friend. The smartest present you ever bought. Don't delay! Limited quantity. Only 25c postpaid, including attractive transparent case. Order today!

**LOUIS KISS, R.F.D. 1, MARLBOROUGH, N. Y.**

**Free for Asthma During Winter**

If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp of breath was the very last; if restless sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address:

Frontier Asthma Co. 92-D Frontier Bldg.  
462 Niagara Street, Buffalo, New York



## 15 DAYS' TRIAL

SEND ONLY 30 CENTS with name, age and address, and by return mail RECEIVE a set of 14 TRIAL GLASSES to select from to fit your eyes. NOTHING MORE TO PAY until you can see perfectly far and near. Then the above beautiful Style will cost you only \$3.95, no more; other styles \$1.95 and up.

We only handle High Grade Single Vision and DOUBLE VISION or KRYPTOK BIFOCAL toric lenses, ground into ONE SOLID PIECE OF GLASS. DOCTOR H. E. BAKER, O.D., with over 30 years' experience. GUARANTEES to give you Perfect Fit or NO COST. Circulars with latest styles and lowest prices FREE.

MODERN SPECTACLE CO., Dept. 91-O,

5125 Pensacola Ave., Chicago, Ill.

## BE A PASSENGER Traffic Inspector

Opportunities for our Trained Graduates  
Write for the story of Railway and Bus Traffic Inspection. We place graduates at up to \$126 per month, plus expense, to start, or regional stations. Interesting work; splendid opportunities. Free Booklet.  
Standard Business Training Institute, Div. 9001, Buffalo, N.Y.



## ASTHMA

Treatment mailed on FREE TRIAL. If satisfied, send \$1; if not, it's Free. Write for treatment today.  
W. K. STERLING, 810 Ohio Ave., SIDNEY, OHIO

## EXPOSE OF GAMBLERS SECRETS

Now ways they read cards. Stop losses. Know also exposes, misers and pawns, also slot machines and pumb board. New book "BEAT THE CHEAT" \$1.00 copy. Add 25c for new 1938 catalog. Send \$1.25 to JOHNSON EXPOSES, Box 2488-P, Kansas City, Mo.



## The Trademark of BETTER Magazines

— on newsstands everywhere!

### THIS SEAL GUARANTEES YOU

- . . . honest reading value (No magazine bearing this seal buys reprint fiction. All stories are new, written especially for this publisher)
- . . . honest writing (The authors who contribute to these magazines are skilled, imaginative workers. They know their facts, and they present them dramatically)
- . . . honest editing (All Popular magazines are assembled and prepared by editors whose story judgment has been tested by years of experience whose knowledge of art and lay-out and business assures you your full dollar's worth in reading pleasure)
- . . . the best fiction on the newsstands (Popular enjoys the largest circulation of all all-fiction magazines)

## don't WORRY

Why put up with years of needless discomfort and worry? Try a Brooks Automatic Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance permits the opening to close, yet holds reducible rupture securely, comfortably—day and night. Thousands report amazing results. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All correspondence confidential.  
BROOKS COMPANY, 458-B State St., Marshall, N.C.



## TERROR TALES

(Continued from page 109)

seum—and the greatest crisis of Dr. Howard's career about to come up. He could not foretell the exact time of the supreme test, but he knew it would be soon . . .

"Estabel," Dr. Howard addressed the body of the girl with a kind of severe petulance. "you have let me down." It was as sharp a reproach as he had permitted himself since his fear had become his constant companion.

He was not sane, and he knew it—for no man who lives wholly by inspiration can claim a reason of his own. He knew he had been sane when he first discovered the process whereby human skin could be made as tough and thick as tanned leather, so that it imprisoned the muscular life within like a strait-jacket, and appeared as lifeless as a relic that had lain underground through the ages.

But he had not been sane since . . . he had talked in a frightened murmur, and he had had qualms. They were not qualms of conscience—he feared only discovery by a hostile world. It was that world, he considered, which had driven him to this in the first place. The world had been niggardly with him, had side-tracked him into the position of a petty executive in a public show. It had forced him to use his wits until they faltered, whereupon his guiding genius had taken charge of him.

But if there were to be more snags—like this one . . . Doctor Howard was trembling fussily when he slid under the wheel of his conservatively-colored sedan, and nosed it out toward New York City. The air was like pure wine—but on that Tuesday morning, he was too upset to appreciate it.

Dr. Timothy Howard stopped on the Manhattan side of the Holland Tunnel, to fill his gas tank. He handed the attendant a dollar bill and got two cents change. It was amazing, the variety of ways in which



# ACCOUNTING

*the profession that pays-*

Accountants command good income. Thousands needed. About 17,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn \$2,000 to \$10,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeep-

ing knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of experienced C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 48-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

Dept. 1324-BC Chicago



## BLACK CHAPEL

money could filter from his pocket. He considered that his whole attitude toward the world would be more generous, if the world should subsidize him. It wouldn't take much—the grocer would never miss a donation of provisions to one man, nor the enormous oil company, nor would the federal government notice an appreciable difference if it ceased to collect taxes on the estate of Timothy Howard . . . peevishly, Dr. Howard realized that human beings are too blind to give an inch and gain a mile.

For they would have been much better off, all of them, if they had not forced him to concentrate on irrelevant details. He didn't like money for its own sake—he thought it a nuisance. And they were forcing him to apply his genius to one great coup, in order that he might forget about money forever. . . .

The sedan, refueled, threaded again through traffic. Dr. Howard was a good driver, enjoying an occasional game of skill for right of way with a cabbie. It relaxed his mind. He began to see the morning's problems with a certain soothing perspective. The death of Estabel left him without a model for his fiftieth century B. C. Egyptian group, but even though circumstances kept him in New York, New York would be cosmopolitan enough to yield him another Namitic type.

Luck and genius were his allies. He was looking for a woman with wide lips

(Continued on page 112)

# ARTHRITIS

If You want to really try to get rid of your Rheumatism—Neuritis—Arthritis—Sciatica—Lumbago you must first get rid of some of the old and false beliefs about them! Read a Book that is informing thousands—"The Inner Mysteries of Rheumatism—Arthritis." In simple words this helpful Book reveals startling, proven facts that every sufferer should know!

The 8th edition is just off the press and a free copy will be mailed without obligation to any sufferer sending their address promptly to the author, H. P. Clearwater, Ph. D., 202-F Street, Hallowell, Maine.

**BE A DETECTIVE**  
Work home or travel. Experience unnecessary. **DETECTIVE** Particulars **FREE**. Write NOW to **GEORGE P. Q. WAGNER** 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

**PIANO — HAWAIIAN (STEEL) GUITAR**  
**SPANISH GUITAR...easily learned at home**  
Become a skilled musician by our simple short-cut note method. Play songs almost instantly. **COST LESS THAN 3c A DAY!** Money back guarantee. Write for free details.  
Mamaan Institute, 3018 N. 24th Place, Dept. P-1, Milwaukee, Wis.



## Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

Salaries of Men and Women in the fascinating profession of Swedish Massage run as high as \$40 to \$70 per week but many prefer to open their own offices. Large incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanitariums and private patients come to those who qualify through our training. Medicating alone offers rich rewards for specialists, trained men. Write today for method of how you can prepare for one of these worthwhile jobs. No obligation.  
Write for Anatomy Charts and booklets—They're FREE.  
The College of Swedish Massage  
1601 Warren Blvd., Dept. 128, Chicago  
(Successor to National College of Massage)

# Diesel

Diesel engines are gaining favor wherever power is used. They are replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, drills, pumps, etc.—which means the well-paid jobs in these lines will go to Diesel-trained men. Write today for method of how you can prepare for one of these worthwhile jobs. No obligation.  
American School, Dept. D-149, Diesel at 58th, Chicago

# FALSE TEETH

**90 DAYS' TRIAL**

**LOWEST PRICES**

If you need teeth, but do not care to spend much money.



**MY METHOD IS** WHAT YOU WANT. **MY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE** gives you 3 months to see how they fit and look. I have thousands of Satisfied Customers in United States and foreign countries. **MY SPECIAL METHOD IS FOUNDED ON 20 YEARS' EXPERIENCE.**

**SEND NO MONEY**

Write TODAY for FREE Booklet and Material.  
**DR. CLEVELAND DENTAL LABORATORY**  
Dept. 45-A, 903-95 Missouri Ave., St. Louis, Ill.

# Classified Advertising

## Antiques For Sale

Indian Relics, Coins, Curios, Catalog 5c. INDIAN MUSEUM, NORTHBRANCH, KANSAS.

## Aviation

AVIATION—Train for Apprenticeship, Mechanic, Pilot, Meteorologist—Good Future. Write immediately, enclosing stamp. Mechanix Universal Aviation Service, Strathmore Station, Dept. UZ, Detroit, Michigan.

## Business Opportunities

START YOU IN BUSINESS. POPCORN MACHINES. Potato Chip Machines. Long Eakins, 2049 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

## Correspondence Courses

500,000 USED CORRESPOND NCE COURSES and Educational Books. Sold. Rented. Exc angled. All subjects. Satisfaction guarantee. Cash ad for used courses. Complete details and bargain catalog FREE. Send name. NE SON COMPANY, 3648 Manhattan Building, Chicago.

## Educational & Instruction

FOREST JOBS AVAILABLE \$125-175 MONTH. Cabin, hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify immediately. Write Rayson Service, C-62, Denver, Colo.

WORK FOR "UNCLE SAM", \$1250-\$2100 year. Try next examinations. List jobs—sample tests, FREE. Franklin Institute, Dept. E56, Rochester, N. Y.

## For Inventors

INVENTORS—WE SUCCESSFULLY SELL inventions, patented and unpatented. Write for proof, and tell us what you have for sale. Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 81, Washington, D. C.

## Patents

PATENTS SECURED. Low Cost. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 573, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Time counts—Don't risk delay in patenting your invention. Write for new 48-Page FREE booklet "Patent Guide for the Inventor." No charge for preliminary information. Clarence A. O'Brien and Hyman Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 16-D Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

Patents Secured. Two valuable booklets sent free. Write immediately: Victor J. Evans & Co., 101-A Victor Building, Washington, D. C.

## Patent Attorneys

HOW TO PROTECT and capitalize on YOUR INVENTION! Patent facts clearly explained. 68 years' experience. FREE BOOKS tell all. Write to C. A. SNOW & CO., 616 Snow Building, Washington, D. C.

## Poems—Songwriters

on writers: In resting Proposition. Write: PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO, L-29, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.

SONGWRITERS: Send your poem today for immediate consideration. RICHARD BROTHERS, 30 Woods Building, Chicago.

SONG POEMS WANTED TO BE SET TO MUSIC. Free examination. Send poems to McNeill, Bachelor of Music, 4133-A South Van Ness, Los Angeles, Calif.

POEM WRITERS, SONGWRITERS—Send for free Rhyming Dictionary, Songwriters' Guide. Submit best poems, melodies today for bonafide, superior offer. MMM STUDIOS, Dept. 32E, Portland, Oregon.

WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS FOR IMMEDIATE consideration. Send poems to Columbian Music Publishers, Ltd., Dept. 14X, Toronto, Can.

SONG POEM, MELODY WRITERS—Write Studio PPS, Guaranty Bldg., Hollywood.

SONGWRITERS! Outstanding, amazing offer. HIBBELER, -24, 2157 No. Avers, Chicago.

## TERROR TALES

(Continued from page 111)

and high cheek-bones, and he might find her this very morning in the museum. It might not be a bad world—for the first time in hours, Dr. Howard appreciated the clear winey October atmosphere. The motor seemed to sing ahead of him. . . .

And then, to cap it all, right inside the museum, he did find her. The most beautiful girl in the world, standing beside the fabulous Von Houten diamond. Yesterday she would not have seemed beautiful, for yesterday he would not have needed her. But today—he was so pleased with her, he could have kissed her. He tipped his hat and said good morning as he passed.

Dr. Howard glanced backward at her again as he went to his office. He could not remember having been more delighted with a young woman, ever. She had come like an answer to a prayer, and no amount of disrespect in her attitude toward him could make him like her less. Dr. Howard even thought expansively of Curt Whelan, who had first attracted Marjorie Welles to the Municipal Museum. Good boy, Whelan—the best! He actually would speak to the trustees this afternoon about raising Whelan's salary. The boy had wanted that a long time—had wanted to get married.

But of course, thought Dr. Howard gently, the marriage part will be out of the question. Absolutely out of the question. . . .

Who and what is this Dr. Howard? What manner of inhuman monster was he that he could so calmly plan to torture and destroy the slender, living body of a beautiful girl? And what indescribable horrors lay before Curt Whelan, Dr. Howard's young assistant, and his fiancée, Marjorie Welles? Edith and Ejler Jacobson give all the answers in their feature-length novelette appearing in the March-April issue of TERROR TALES. . . .



# Will You Give Me 7 Days to PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man*?

LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE

**5 inches of new Muscle**

"After ONE WEEK my arms increased 1 1/2 in., chest, 2 1/2 in., forearm 7/8 in."—C. S., W. Va.

**What a difference!**

"Started a week ago. Have put 31 1/2 in. on chest (normal) and 21 1/2 in. expanded."—F. S., N. Y.

**Here's what ATLAS did for ME!**

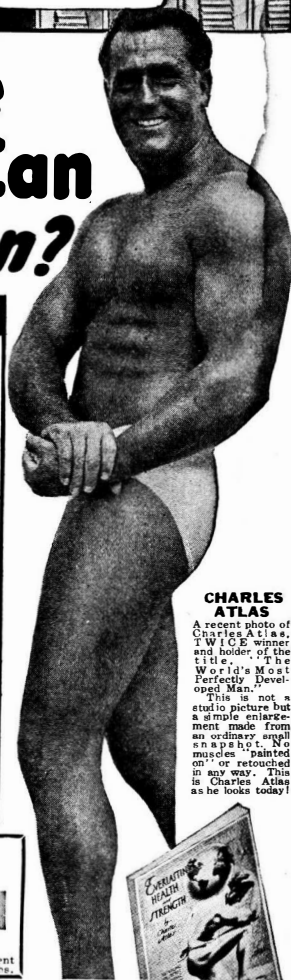
**John Jacobs BEFORE**      **John Jacobs AFTER**

**For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS**

"Am sending snapshot of wonderful progress. Certainly recommend you for quick results!"—W. G., N. J.

**GAINED 29 POUNDS**

"Your method gives long, smooth muscle. When I started, I weighed only 141. Now weigh 170."—T. K., N. Y.



**CHARLES ATLAS**  
A recent photo of Charles Atlas, TWICE winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."  
"This is not a studio picture but a simple enlargement made from an ordinary snapshot. No muscles "painted on" or retouched in any way. This is Charles Atlas as he looks today!"

## 7-Day TRIAL OFFER

I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But what you want to know is—"What can Charles Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—at my risk! Right in first 7 days I'll start to PROVE I can turn YOU into a man of might and muscle. And it will be the kind of PROOF you (and anyone else) can SEE, FEEL, MEASURE with a tape!

My FREE BOOK tells about my amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER—an offer no other instructor as ever DARED make! If YOU want smashing strength, big muscles, glowing health—I'll show you results QUICK!

### FREE BOOK

I myself was once a 97-pound weakling—sickly, half-alive. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." And I twice won—against all comers—the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man!"

I have no use for apparatus. "Dynamic Tension" ALONE (right in your own home) will start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountains of muscle on your biceps—free you of constipation, pimples—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

Make me PROVE it! Gamble a postage stamp. Send coupon for my FREE BOOK AT ONCE! Address me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 83A, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

**Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away**  
This valuable cup, of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base. I will award it, engraved, to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83A, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

I want: proof that DYNAMIC TENSION will make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-Day Trial Offer.

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City..... State.....



*Merry Christmas  
Everybody...*



*...and to everybody  
more smoking pleasure*

Chesterfield Cigarettes in their attractive Christmas cartons appeal to everyone. Their refreshing *mildness* and *better taste* give smokers everywhere more pleasure.

**Chesterfield** *They Satisfy*