

SEPTEMBER

15'



# TERROR TALES



THREE THRILLING  
MYSTERY NOVELLETTES

**I AM A  
FRANKENSTEIN!**

By WAYNE ROGERS

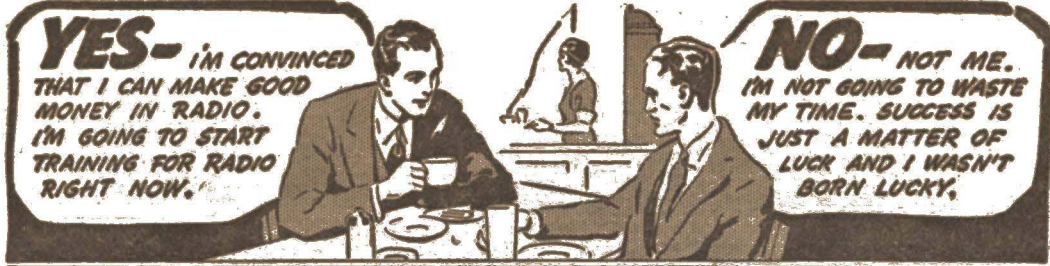
**VENGEANCE OF  
THE LIVING DEAD**

By RALSTON SHIELDS

**THEY SHALL FEED  
AT MIDNIGHT**

By RAYMOND WHETSTONE





**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



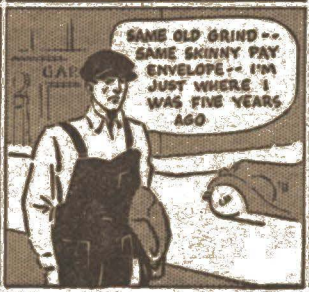
OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

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 JOB IN RADIO

**J. E. SMITH, President**  
National Radio Institute  
Established 25 Years

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

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

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio, Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

## Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start show-

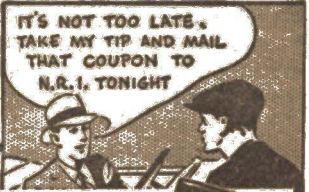
ing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 80-80 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after your graduate.

## Find Out What Radio and Television Offer You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and

Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard--NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President**  
Dept. 0159,  
National Radio Institute  
Washington, D. C.



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

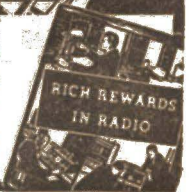
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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name .....

Address .....

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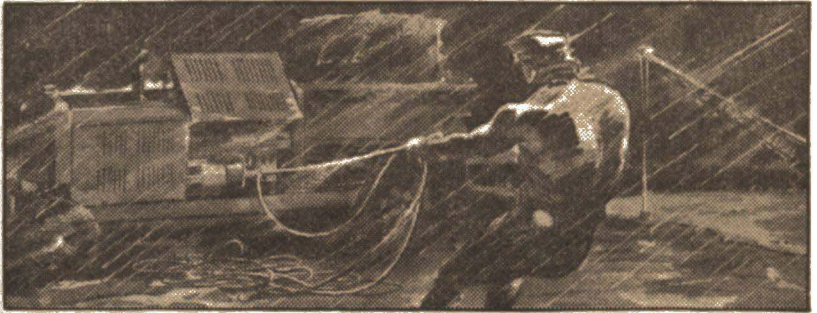
# ONE MORE STEP— AND ETERNITY!

A true experience of **LYLE EMMONS, Kildare, New York**



"THE WIND HOWLED and the darkness seemed to increase as I arrived at the quarry, where I was to do a welding job on a big steam shovel," writes Mr. Emmons. "The rain streamed down in slanting torrents."

"IN THAT DRIVING STORM I had to move slowly about, walking with my back to the wind and tugging at my heavy gear. Then suddenly I had a horrible, sickening sensation of danger."

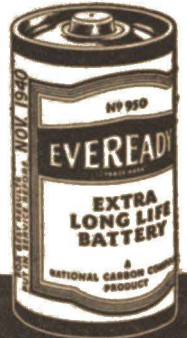


"I GRABBED MY FLASHLIGHT and swung it behind me. I peered straight down a 90 foot drop to a pile of jagged rocks! You can tell the world that I was thankful for my flashlight and its dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries. I'll never be without them!"

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*Lyle Emmons*



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# TERROR TALES



VOLUME TWELVE

SEPT., 1940

NUMBER FOUR

## FOUR THRILLING MYSTERY NOVELTTIES

- I Am a Frankenstein!**..... Wayne Rogers 6  
 When man takes it upon himself to create new life out of death, he must be prepared for the inevitable, hell-born consequences. But it was not until Barry Cooper stood with the deadly scalpel poised over the brain of lovely Ruth Meredith, that he realized how far he had gone on the road to damnation!
- Bodies Born for Slaughter**..... Donald Dale 36  
 Why did the aged and infirm of Youth Springs find such ghoulish joy in beholding the bloodless, mutilated body of May Hobson? Did it mean that the incredible had actually come to pass—that age had won the final victory over youth?
- They Shall Feed at Midnight**..... Raymond Whetstone 64  
 No wonder they stared at me in horror, and slunk away when I approached. For I had become one with the part I was playing—I was Lupus, the werewolf!
- Vengeance of the Living Dead**..... Ralston Shields 88  
 When the heavy knife plunged into Tom Stuart's heart, James Berwick felt that at last his vengeance was complete. No one, he told himself, could possibly believe in Stuart's ravings about wandering souls . . . and the Justice of Karan.

## THREE SPINE-TINGLING SHORT STORIES

- Lost!**..... E. G. Morris 26  
 Up from the foul ageless depths of the sea they came—to find a companion to share with them the loneliness of death!
- School for Horror**..... Nathaniel Grew 55  
 Helplessly I had to watch while that ghastly sorcery visited upon my wife all the agonies of body and mind suffered by her sister—though hundreds of miles separated them!
- College of Corpses**..... Mindret Lord 81  
 What was the fantastic plot that brought to our small college town all the concentrated horrors of the natural world?

—AND—

- Days of Darkness**..... The Editor 4  
 What must we do to live? . . .
- Black Chapel**..... A Department 110  
 Background for terror. . . .

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU



AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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# DAYS OF DARKNESS

**T**HESE ARE DARK DAYS. Already almost half the surface of the earth is damp with the blood of mankind—heroes and cowards alike; the innocent and the guilty, lying together in the common denominator of death. Already in those lands where the gods of war have gathered, the funeral pyres are burning darkly and the clouds that fill the sky above them are thunderheads of hate and despair—thunderheads that are filled with the ghastly music of bursting bombs and exploding shells.

These are dangerous days, especially for us in this great country of one hundred and thirty million free and democratic people, for those clouds of hate and despair are threatening us too. As yet they are still distant—but we can see them gathering on the horizon and we can hear their rumbling.

It is for us to say whether they shall come closer, or whether they shall be pushed back beyond sight and hearing. It is for us to say whether we shall thrill to the sight of a gleaming silver airliner blazing a trail of peace through the brilliant blue, or whether we shall tremble in the darkness of concrete rabbit warrens while above us a fleet of bombers prepare to unloose their deadly cargo.

We can decide whatever we wish—but if democracy is to survive, if ever again the free voice of a free people is to be heard, we must make our decision wisely and calmly. Hysteria cannot help us, nor can fear. We must retain our reason; keep a tight hold on the fundamental sanity which is one of the greatest assets of America and Americans. We must remember that ~~hate~~ is the weapon of injustice, never of ~~justice~~.

Yet it is natural that our emotions be aroused by what we hear every day and almost every hour; it is natural that we worry over what may come. We would

not be normal otherwise—but it is neither natural, normal nor wise if we let our worries and fears dominate our judgment.

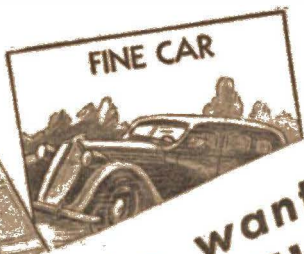
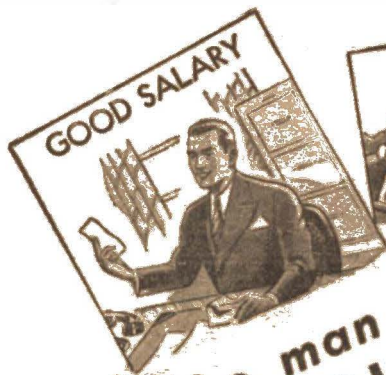
We must find an antidote for fear, a remedy for hate. We must have an outlet for those surplus emotions which might prove our destruction. Our feelings can be compared to the waters of a great lake piled up high behind its restraining dam. If that dam has no effective spillway, then perhaps the next heavy rain will send the water tearing over the top, undermining its flanks, until the dam is no more and the whole mass of water is free to spread havoc and desolation.

We have already seen the damage such an emotional flood can cause. It was the overflowing resentment of the peasant against the aristocracy that caused the French Revolution and the orgies of Madame Guillotine; the tyrannies of the Russian Tsars that led to Stalin and the OGPU; the harshness of Versailles that helped the madman of Germany into power. And in a lesser way in our own country, it was the abnormal overflow of emotion that was responsible for the Klu Klux Klan and the Black Legion.

Let us not have anything like that again. Let us make sure that the citizens of our democratic land be never subject to the tortures, the dungeons and the concentration camps of an American Gestapo—or a Nazi one. Let us see the dangers and the pitfalls that lie before us, analyze them calmly—and make our decision wisely.

And above all, let us not lose our heads. We can make that spillway for our emotions so that they can always be clean and fresh and never stagnant and festering—we can make that spillway by normal activities. By playing golf; by going to the movies; by reading books and magazines—by these means we can keep hate and fear from our hearts and souls. . . .

THE EDITOR



To the man who wants to enjoy  
**an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER**



**IF** you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$2,000 to \$10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

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Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

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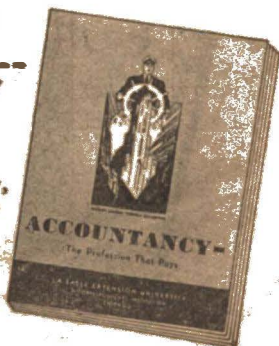
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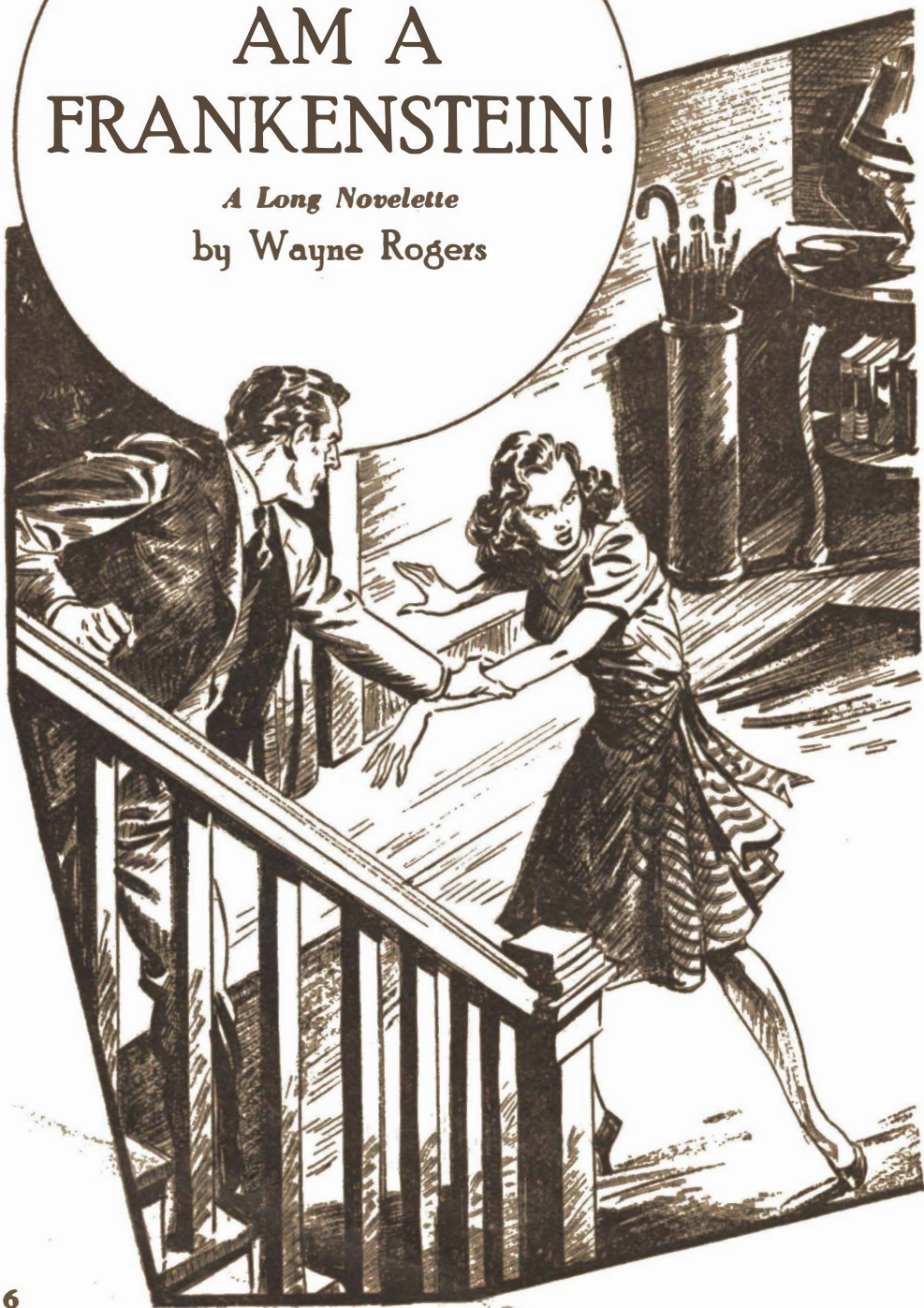
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*No man can play at being  
God — unless the Devil  
himself shall aid him!*

# I AM A FRANKENSTEIN!

*A Long Novelette*  
by Wayne Rogers





*With my own hands I created the thing  
which was to destroy  
me....*



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Master of the Knife*

**T**HE opportunity to work with the celebrated Godfrey Kittredge was one in a lifetime, one any young doctor fresh from his internship would have grabbed. And I grabbed it eagerly. To start out on my professional career as assistant to a man whom I had heard described as one of the country's

*Grabbing the terrified girl by the arm, I dragged her upstairs. . .*

most eminent surgeons—it meant assured success; more than that, it meant a chance to devote myself wholeheartedly to the research work to which I wanted to dedicate my life.

Only Ruth Meredith objected.

"You are worn out," she protested. "You have been working entirely too hard. What you need is a rest—and instead of that you want to tie yourself up with a man who works twenty-four hours a day. Dr. Kittredge is supposed to be a slave-driver; he will ruin your health. Why can't you be reasonable and stay here—let Uncle Lyman arrange a place for you in the clinic at the Meredith Memorial?"

But a sinecure in the Meredith Memorial Hospital was one of the things I was determined not to have at Ruth's hands—or at the hands of Lyman Ritchie, an old friend of Ruth's dead parents, and her guardian,

It was he who made the contact with Godfrey Kittredge and secured the opening for me; and that, I was resolved, was all the Meredith money was going to do for me—except to send me permanently out of Ruth's life.

There was a time when I had had other plans, but my grueling years as an interne had taught me how impossible those dreams were. There was no fortune to be made in medicine; not the way I wanted to follow it, at any rate—and there would be no happiness for a girl of Ruth's wealth and luxurious habits to be chained to an impecunious young scientist. Her place was in her own set; married to Arnold Ritchie, Lyman's son, or to someone of his position.

No, Godfrey Kittredge was exactly what I needed, I told myself; he would be just the anodyne to ease the ache in my heart. And so I turned a deaf ear to Ruth's pleas. Resolutely I set out for Halstead—and opened wide the flood-gates of doom . . . .

**I** K EW that Kittredge had established his laboratory somewhere in the country so as to be free from interruptions, but I was hardly prepared for that Halstead station. It was a mere shed, with a cubbyhole office for a part-time agent; a flag-stop that would have been passed had I not been on the train. It was deserted except for an old Ford that stood beside the rickety shed. Out from behind the wheel a middle-aged, dull-witted looking individual stepped.

"You Dr. Cooper?" he greeted.

"Yes," I acknowledged. "I suppose you are Dr. Kittredge's man—"

But with that the blank expression dropped from his face. His eyes opened wide—eyes that were filled with something that was very much like terror. For a moment his lips moved before sound came from them.

"I'm no man of his," he blurted then, as if the denial afforded him overwhelming relief. "I come for you, that's all. Get in."

Back in the car, he hunched over the wheel and glowered silently through the windshield. We had gone some distance before I could wheedle more than monosyllables out of him, but gradually he became more communicative.

He was Irving Haskins, I learned. He operated a small gasoline station at a crossroads some two miles from the Kittredge place. For the past six or seven weeks the doctor had been employing him to meet infrequent arrivals at the station. Ever since Quinlan, the last Kittredge chauffeur, had quit and had not been replaced.

Haskins eyed me with a covert side-glance, seemed to debate whether to say any more.

"I drove him to the station," he muttered then. "Knew him sorts—on account of him droppin' in at my place for gas. And if ever I see a man scared he was. Said he wouldn't stay in that place another

night for no amount of money—and folks around here don't blame him none."

Again the furtive side-glance shot in my direction, but now his taciturnity had evaporated.

"There's things 'tain't man's business to meddle with—things like dyin'," he pronounced doggedly. "When a thing is dead it oughter stay dead. I ain't never been in that place since the doctor took it over, and I ain't goin' in. I don't want no mixin' with critters that've been dead and come alive again—even if they're only animals—"

The usual superstitious nonsense that springs up about any scientist in a backwoods community, I assured myself. If he was not careful, Dr. Kittredge's inquisitive neighbors would have him in court for vivisection, if nothing else—

But at that moment we rounded a bend in the road and turned in at a heavily treed driveway—and an instinctive, unreasoning doubt flashed into my mind. It was that building looming ahead of us; it seemed to reach out for me with tentacular, clammy-cold fingers.

Certainly Dr. Kittredge could not have chosen a more gloomy, forbidding place if he had deliberately gone in search of one. The house was three stories high, built of stone; dark, gray-brown stone that was depressingly drab. Its unlighted windows were utterly desolate; dead panes that seemed to warn one away rather than to welcome. Overhead, two ungraceful towers reached up into the gathering dusk like stubby, broken-off fingers. Close around the foundation grew a riot of thick, unkempt shrubbery, while a double line of straggly, half-dead pines led up to the door. The dreary melancholy of the place was overpowering.

There was no doubt about its effect upon Haskins. He could not get me out of the car fast enough. Without waiting for me to be admitted, he swung around and fled back to the road—leaving me

feeling like a marooned castaway as I thumped the heavy iron door-knocker.

MY KNOCK was answered by a tall, cadaverous faced fellow who stood like a skeleton in the doorway. His dull, vacant-looking eyes stared at me inquiringly, but not a word came from his lips. Behind him I glimpsed the hallway, as uninviting as the outside of the building; a dimly lighted, barely furnished entrance that might have led into a buried crypt. A chill place that sent its dank breath into my very bones.

"Dr. Kittredge?" I asked uncertainly—and saw that the strange doorman did not seem to hear me.

But at that moment there was a commotion in the dim recesses of the deep-shadowed hall, and out strode a man who I knew must be Godfrey Kittredge. A tall, broad-shouldered man with a high forehead and a leonine head. His hair was nearly white and his face and neck were much-wrinkled, but his stride was still elastic.

"Hello, Cooper!" he boomed as he strode toward me. "Come on in; come on in, lad. Just in time to join me in a whiskey before dinner—and I daresay you can stand it after your trip."

My hand was engulfed in his, was vised in a grip that seemed to have lost little of its power as he drew me into the light—but at that moment I felt I would be drawn straight toward him even if he had not laid a finger upon me. Dr. Kittredge did not need to use his hands; his eyes were sufficient. They were magnetic, compelling; fierce, hypnotic eyes that beat one into submission. I could not tear loose from them until I had drained the glass he thrust into my hand and he turned to refill it for me.

"Jacob, the man who admitted you, may have struck you as a trifle odd?" he broached as we sat down to dinner. "He does not talk much; not at all, at times.

He is my man-of-all-work and my patient as well. There are not many of us here. Just Jacob and Olga, my cook, and myself. You will fit in very nicely, Cooper—yes, you will be my new pair of hands; the hands I need so badly.”

And only then did I notice that his own powerful hands, held up in front of him, shook as if palsied.

Olga, like Jacob, did not talk much. She was an elderly, hard-faced woman, with broad, Slavic features. She merely nodded when Kittredge introduced us; seemed to look to him not only for the usual orders but for every command. Something about that abject docility was weird and strangely disquieting—and as I watched her I thought I began to understand why Quinlan, the chauffeur, had been so anxious to leave that house.

“I don’t want no mixin’ with critters that’ve been dead and come alive again—” The echo of Irving Haskins’ words whispered in my memory; and despite the warmth of the liquor inside of me I shivered . . . .

That night Kittredge took me all through the building; through his well-equipped laboratory and the cellar room where his livestock was penned. Cats, dogs, rabbits, goats, even monkeys—he had scores of them; and very soon I was to learn why the supply of these creatures was so ample.

In the morning we went to work, and Godfrey Kittredge quickly demonstrated that his reputation for industry was not exaggerated. Day and night we worked, until I felt that I could hardly hold the scalpel he kept so constantly in my hand—and yet I hardly dared refuse to go on. There was something about Kittredge that made his will unchallenged law; something about his compelling eyes that would brook no denial.

Daily I felt myself yielding to him more and more completely.

“Life—it is the secret of life itself that

I am seeking, Cooper,” his insistent voice droned in my ears. “Life that will know no death. Life everlasting. I had it almost within my grasp—and my hands betrayed me. But now I have your hands, and they will not fail me. Your hands will soon be as skilled with the knife as mine ever were.”

Life everlasting! That sounded fantastic, frightening—and yet I could not muster the courage to tell him so. I followed his orders, cutting and probing, slicing and suturing, until it seemed that I worked in a mental fog, a creature entirely of his will. No more than the hands following the dictates of his brain, I did things inconceivable with those dumb animals—horrible things from which I revolted but to which I was driven by his unflagging zeal, his blazing, fanatical determination. . . .

It was while I was in the midst of one of those delicate operations that the lineman was electrocuted.

Godfrey Kittredge was a master-hand in the uses of electrolysis and electrotherapy. He had a special high-power line leading to the laboratory. It was to repair this that the lineman came. I did not see him when he arrived, had forgotten all about him until the line blew out completely; and when that happened, he was dead.

KITTREDGE worked over him frantically, but there was no hope of restoring his life. Even then, the old man was not satisfied. He managed to secure permission to perform an autopsy—and it seemed that his fingers rose to the occasion and regained their steadiness for the task. Carefully he opened the skull and probed into the brain.

“Burned out—completely destroyed,” he muttered, as he severed it and freed it from the skull cavity.

Then he was probing into the chest, opening it with infinite care, testing the

lunga, the stilled heart; and his eyes, when they flashed up to me, were the blazing eyes of a master on the verge of a profound discovery—or of a raving madman!

"The brain is gone, but there is nothing here that cannot be repaired," he half-whispered. "Nothing here that I cannot restore with the same force that ravaged it. If only I could, Cooper—if only I dared! Once restored, this flesh would be almost incorruptible, almost impervious to death! Once dead, it would be emancipated from the grave! But I don't dare—with this one. There would be too great an outcry. But I see the way now—I see how we can succeed!"

Instinctively I recoiled from him—but, God knows, I had no conception at that moment of the unthinkable horrors that were spawning in his seething brain!

Kittredge was a changed man after that. He was more quiet, more somber, more savagely determined that my skill must be perfected to the highest degree. And sometimes when I suddenly caught his eyes fixed upon me there was a light far back in their depths that sent an apprehensive chill jibbering down my spine. I wanted to get away from him, but I did not dare; I knew that I was chained more securely than metal shackles ever could have fettered me! Chained and waiting—for what?

In a few days I was to know.

Less than a week after the lineman's death, an undertaker's truck drew up at our door and a long wicker corpse-basket was carried inside to the laboratory. In that basket was the corpse of a burly six-footer who had weighed well over two hundred pounds. There was a small shaved spot on the top of the ugly-faced bruiser's head, and the right leg of his trousers was slit to the knee.

"Joe Gammon—the murderer!" Godfrey Kittredge beamed down upon the brutal features that seemed to smolder even in death. "He was executed last night, and

I obtained his body. He is our man, Cooper—he is the opportunity we have been waiting for!"

What did he intend to do? A flood of horrible suggestions rushed into my shocked brain, revolting suggestions that sickened me as I watched him strip the corpse and lay it out on the operating table that was specially equipped with electrical hook-ups; as I watched him fasten the ankles and wrists into electrical mittens through which the current would pass. Fascinated, I stared at the livid abdominal scar where a knife had once given Gammon what for any other man would have been a death wound; stared until Kittredge's sharp voice snapped into my horror-fogged consciousness.

"Open the skull," he directed, as he tested the cold flesh with his sensitive instruments; and mechanically I obeyed.

This was only a corpse, I told myself as the trephine bit into the bone; only the corpse of a vicious murderer—and yet there seemed to be something unholy, something appallingly horrible, about what I was doing. I could feel the cold sweat heading out on me, could feel my knees weakening—

But the keen eyes of Dr. Kittredge read me infallibly. Quickly he stepped to a side cabinet and poured a glass full of amber-colored liquid, came back and thrust it into my hand.

"Swallow that," he commanded.

THE potent mixture coursed through my veins like liquid fire, seemed to set my blood a-boil; but then the conflagration subsided, to leave me a burned out shell. All feeling seemed to have drained out of me, all reaction to everything but the power of Godfrey Kittredge's blazing eyes and the commands of his crackling voice.

It was then that he went to a little room at the side of the laboratory and came back wheeling a table before him; a table with a white-sheeted body lying on it. I

stared with horror-distended eyes, and recognized the cadaverous face of Jacob, the man of all work—and the full enormity of what was about to happen came crashing in upon me!

"Careful now, my dear Cooper," he warned, as he thrust a scalpel into my

Every instinct struggled to hold me back, yet I had to follow the dictates of a will stronger than my own.

With that devilish scalpel ready in my hand I stepped to the head of the table—and hesitated.

"This is not murder," Kittredge seemed able to read my every thought. "We are simply about to transplant a life, to take it from this weak, unhealthy body and put it into a sturdy one. Yes, and we are going to do more, Cooper; we are making ~~strides~~—the greatest strides in all the history of surgery! We are lifting man out of the grave, making his body invulnerable. This body was Joe Gannon's when it died, but when I bring it back to life it will be Jacob's—my Jacob's, Cooper. A new, deathless body at the command of a brain that knows no will but mine!"

This madman thought he could create an ungodly Frankenstein's monster. He intended to force me to do murder to accomplish his fantastic purpose—and I could not resist him!

Like a soul detached, a soul riveted to the floor with appalling horror, I watched myself perform that ghastly operation—

My fingers were like ice, numb and detached from the rest of my body, and yet they moved with certain surety.

My brain screamed with self denunciation as I worked, but that savage will blazing at me from Godfrey Kittredge's eyes held me remorselessly to my task—held me there beside the table until at last I stepped back, the monstrous operation finished, the cold sweat streaming down into my eyes and bathing my limp hands.

It was finished. I had killed a man in cold blood; had cut the living brain from his body and transplanted it into the cranium of a corpse!

Physically ill with revulsion, with contempt for my shameful weakness, I turned away, reeling, but again Kittredge was at my side. His hand fastened on my arm,



hand. "Yesterday you were perfect with the monkey. Today you need only repeat what you did then—and this time we will have a splendid, strong body waiting to receive the brain you excise. Remember, remember not to cut too close to the nerve centers—"

led me across the room for another dose of his fiery brew; led me to a couch where exhaustion quickly overcame me. I slept—and, God in heaven, how I wish I had never come back from that realm of blessed unconsciousness!

WHEN I opened my eyes I thought I must be dreaming; thought I must be in the grip of a frightful nightmare. It must have been the hum of a motor, the whine of high-power electric current, that woke me. Everything about me seemed unreal—especially that figure stretched out on the operating table. And then in a flash I remembered the grisly operation I had performed. Kittredge was still hovering over the corpse of the executed murderer, was watching it with the fanatically blazing eyes of a man possessed—was lifting the corpse's arm, *helping it to sit up!*

A nightmare, of course, I frantically reassured myself—but I knew that I lied! I knew that my staring eyes were wide open; knew that I was seeing, not imagining. I knew that I was seeing a corpse come to life.

Horror froze my blood and made leaden weights of my limbs. I could not move a muscle; I could only lie there, propped up on my elbows, staring at that fearful resurrection. What I saw was nothing human; it was diabolical black magic that must have had its being in the nethermost pit of hell!

That creature—that impossible *thing*—had dropped a leg off the table; was getting down onto the floor. For a moment my bulging eyes stared at the ugly knife-scar on its belly, and then a mad scream surged up to my lips—and hung there unuttered. I could not scream. Not a sound would pass my frozen lips. I could only lie there and watch that uncanny revenant get to its feet, watch it stand and stare uncertainly around the room, watch it turn and start in my direction—and then

all hell broke loose in my tortured brain.

A thousand discordant voices seemed to be yelling and screaming in my head. My skull seemed to be bulging, to be splitting wide open. My senses reeled sickeningly as I tried to struggle to my feet—and pitched headlong into a whirling, stygian-black maelstrom that echoed with the mad howls of a myriad demons . . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hell's Sacrament

GODFREY KITTREDGE was sitting beside my bed when I came back to consciousness. It was the hypodermic syringe in his hand that had dragged me back to the realm of ghastly reality.

"You have had a shock, but you are recovering from it very nicely," he soothed. "Take it easy; you will be all right in a little while."

All right? I might be able to get to my feet in a little while, but at that moment I knew that never again would the world be all right for me; never again would I be able to rid my mind of the haunting horrors that came surging into it the moment memory returned. I was a murderer, a maker of monsters, a tool of Satan himself!

Madness welled up within me—but Kittredge took me in hand, and once more his overpowering will beat my cowering brain into subjection. He calmed me, forced me to get a grip on myself. He whispered that our work was not yet finished, told me that I must get well—and as I looked into his hypnotic eyes I knew that I would.

I recovered my strength quickly—or so it seemed; but before that day was out I realized how completely Kittredge now dominated me. My brain was like a numb thing in my skull, a thing that could writhe in agony but could do nothing to alleviate my miserable condition. I *seemed* to have lost all power of volition; I could

do what Kittredge told me to do and nothing else—and in that moment I remembered Jacob.

Yes, I had become another Jacob—an automaton with a brain that knew no will but Godfrey Kittredge's! I staggered to a mirror, and the glass corroborated my terrible fear. My eyes were blank, my face vacuous—just as Jacob's had been!

Kittredge came into my room as I was staring at my dismaying reflection, and he took down the mirror. After that none was allowed near me, but even without a mirror I knew what I looked like—knew what had been done to me!

Drugs? Yes, I had been drugged, no doubt. Those potions Kittredge had given me to swallow and the hypodermic injections he administered—they had robbed me of every semblance of will power, had made me his abject slave. More than that, I was dependent on him now for injections to ease the intolerable spasms of pain that periodically seized me and threatened to plunge me over the abyss into insanity.

I was a prisoner in that house just as surely as if I had been weighted down with tons of chains. A prisoner under the almost constant surveillance of either Kittredge or his bleak-faced housekeeper. The only time I was permitted out of their sight was when I was in my room—with the windows heavily barred and the door locked.

But those precautions were unnecessary. I knew that I had not the will to escape. I knew that I could not have taken flight if every door and window were wide open. I was beaten, cowed, as abject a nonentity as that dreadful graveling that now lived in the house with us. Several times during the next week I saw him, but Kittredge now kept him locked in a room on the third floor—and God knows I had no desire to go anywhere near him. He was with me constantly enough in my tormented thoughts.

The only solace I could find was in work, and Kittredge gave me plenty of that. Again we spent hours on end at the operating table. Again I caught him eyeing me speculatively, with evil satisfaction—and horror whispered again in my brain.

What was he planning now? What new madness was festering in that fiendish brain?

There was no answer in Kittredge's emotionless face. . . .

My only possibility of escape from that hell-hole was Irving Haskins, the gas station man, I told myself after I had gone over every angle of my problem. Certainly that was the merest wisp of a hope—but if Haskins should come to the building again it was barely possible that I might summon the will to run to his car; barely possible that I might make him understand my terrible position and send him for help even if I could not manage to flee with him.

Haskins . . . . I thought of him daily, nightly. He became an obsession with me, until I was certain that he would come; and then suddenly I knew that he *was* coming—and the bottom dropped out of my last hope!

**I**T WAS Kittredge who shattered it when I overheard him answering the telephone.

"Yes—yes—excellent, my dear Haskins," I heard him chortling over the wire. "A motion picture actor who is not too well known—excellent. We shall make preparations to receive them—and you shall be well rewarded for your alertness."

There was something about the ring of his voice, about the unholy satisfaction that cloaked his every syllable, that sent a chill down my back. And when he turned to face me the blazing madness was in his eyes, his face was rapt—and I knew that Irving Haskins had failed me. Haskins **was** in this devil's pay. He was bringing



new victims to this terrible place—new victims for God only knew what horrible purposes!

But that at least I would be able to prevent, I told myself doggedly. Somehow I must warn them, must send them away before this madman could manage to enslave them. Somehow—

But that only shows how I underestimated Godfrey Kittredge.

"You are not looking well, Cooper," he declared, as he suddenly eyed me with concern. "Come to the laboratory, and I shall pep you up."

Fear of what I knew was coming brought out the goose-pimples all over my body, but I went with him helplessly. I took the mixture he prescribed for me, and I drank it.

"We are to have visitors in a few minutes," he told me then. "I shall have to prepare for them, so I must ask you to answer the door."

To answer the door! There was my opportunity! Wild hope flared within me; desperate plans took shape in my turbulent brain. Here was my chance to warn these new victims—to send them running to safety—to beg them to seize me and take me with them. Anxiously I waited for the sound of the knocker. At last it boomed through the house—and I started across the dimly lit hall to the door.

A man and a woman stood beyond the threshold when I opened. A man and a woman. I gaped at them and saw the surprised question in their eyes as they looked at me. I tried to speak—and I couldn't!

"Is the minister—is Dr. Kittredge at home?" the man asked. "We are the ones he is to marry."

Marry! What abomination was this to be? I wanted to send them away from this terrible door—but I could not utter a syllable, could not move a muscle. There, behind them, I saw the dull-faced gas station man—ready to grab me if I attempted

to bolt. But he was unnecessary; I could only stand there and gape like the mindless automaton I was!

"Bring them in, Cooper; bring them in!" I heard Kittredge's voice booming behind me, and I stepped aside to let the couple pass—and closed the door after them; but not before I had seen Haskins climb back into their car, had seen it start off down the driveway . . . .

"My man who admitted you may have struck you as a trifle odd," I heard Kittredge explaining confidentially as I crossed the hall. "He does not talk much; not at all, at times—"

And Jacob's cadaverous face rose like a wraith to accuse me, to damn me for the heinous crime I had committed against him!

What need I say of that ghastly mockery of a marriage? The groom was Talbot Wilson, a middle-aged motion picture actor whom I could not recall having seen on the screen. That was not surprising, however, I decided; Wilson's face was very ordinary, very unimpressive, the sort of face you would easily forget—except, perhaps, for a rather prominent mole on his right cheek. In fact, I admitted, as I studied him, he looked more than a little like me—before my metamorphosis. His bride-to-be was Alice Adair, a pretty young movie ingenue. They were vacationing some miles away and had decided on a sudden elopement—and when they had asked Irving Haskins to direct them to a minister he had sent them to Kittredge.

Like a benevolent old parson, Kittredge took his place in front of them, with a church service book in his hand. Like mute dummies Olga and I stood by as witnesses. Like the blasphemous chanting of the Black Mass the words of the marriage service fell from the lips of that conscienceless manspreader—while horror rioted in my reeling brain. ~~While I~~ I thought that surely I must go still

I WANTED to shout him down. I wanted to scream a warning to those unsuspecting dupes. I wanted to denounce him for the impostor he was—and I could say nothing, could do nothing. I stood there, helpless, chained in silence and in immobility. I stood there and could only speculate on the doom that hung over those two bowed heads when that monster mouthed a hypocritical benediction!

Now, I told myself, it would come—and then I saw it coming. Smiling benevolently, Kittredge insisted that we all drink a health to the bride. A health to the bride . . . death to the bride—in poisonous drugs! The screaming warning hammered against the back of my teeth and would go no further—and I drank that diabolical health with them . . . .

The stuff acted speedily. The girl began to sway groggily, reached a hand wonderingly to her forehead, even before she had reached the doorway. Wilson must have divined some notion of their peril. His eyes widened and he whirled, started to open his mouth—but Kittredge was behind him, was wrapping strong arms around him. There was no struggle; Wilson stiffened and went limp, and the girl was already out on her feet, held upright by Olga's grasp.

At Kittredge's direction I helped him carry Wilson into the laboratory and lift him onto an operating table. Then I left them, while I helped Olga carry the "bride" upstairs to be locked in one of those cell-like third-floor rooms.

What hellish devilry was afoot? What new outrage had Kittredge's twisted brain spawned? Those questions hammered in my mind—and I did not dare attempt to answer them. What was going on in that evil laboratory? I did not want to know, I told myself again and again; I did not want to go near the gruesome death chamber—but there was no avoiding it. Kittredge's booming voice summoned me.

Wilson had been stripped when I

stepped through the doorway. His clothing was piled on a chair, and his sheeted body lay stretched on a table. He was unconscious. Kittredge beamed down on him with satisfaction; ran his fingers over the actor's face, and beamed again. Then he stepped into the side room off the laboratory—to return with a wheel-table on which lay the unconscious body of the thing that had Joe Gannon's corpse and Jacob's brain!

I helped him lift it from the wheel-table to the electrically equipped operating table—and I knew that Talbot Wilson was to die; that this unearthly *thing* was to live.

"How are you feeling, Cooper?" Kittredge eyed me solicitously. "Better drink this," as he pressed another of his concoctions to me. "I want you to be at your best tonight. We have been splendidly successful so far; it would be a pity to have anything go wrong now. But nothing will go wrong," his voice rang with confidence. "What we have to do now is simple compared to what we already have accomplished.

"Our creation," he affectionately patted the sheeted form of that terrible graveling, "is all that I hoped. He is ready to go out and take his place in the world of men. Almost ready, Cooper—but not quite. His face—have you thought of that? The face of an executed murderer. That would never do. It would raise a tempest, would bring the authorities swarming around our ears. But that is not necessary, is it?" he eyed me craftily. "Our man will go out into the world safely, so that nobody will be able to recognize him."

God Almighty! I knew in that moment what he contemplated! I knew what he was going to say. I shrank away from it, but his words lashed out at me like biting whips.

"WE ARE going to give him *this* face, Cooper—Wilson's face." His words cut into my brain. "You are going

to effect the transformation. First this face—you will lift it entirely from the bones. Then the other. You will cut it away and graft this one into place while I administer the healing current. All right, Cooper—begin!"

Begin to commit murder! *And I did!*

As he finished talking, he thrust that diabolical scalpel into my unresisting fingers, and at his command it went into action.

First Wilson, and then that creature. While my soul writhed and mutely screamed in futile protest, my adept fingers were busily performing a miracle of surgery. A miracle that must fail, I assured myself with what was almost satisfaction—but when I saw that gray-headed fiend lovingly hovering over the ghastly creature that was now fashioned from parts of three men a horrible chill stole through my whole body.

I *knew* at that moment that he would succeed in keeping his monstrosity alive—and he did. For twenty-four hours he nursed it, tended it almost ceaselessly, while I was not permitted near it—and then I saw it walk! I saw him lead that fearful human fabrication that was Joe Gannon's body, Jacob's brain and Talbot Wilson's face; saw him come out of the laboratory with it and take it upstairs to its quarters!

Was I still sane? I did not know. I *could* not be, I told myself over and over again.

No sane man could see the things I had seen; no sane man could *believe* he had seen the things I had seen—and yet I knew there was no doubting the damning evidence of my eyes; no doubting the terrible handiwork of my own hands!

Perhaps this was the way of insanity, seeing things you knew could not be so, believing that you saw the impossible—and knowing that you had seen it. Perhaps such irrationality was the way of lunacy—

It was in the midst of one of those spells or agonized thinking, of excruciating brain-torture, that I felt Godfrey Kittredge's eyes boring into me and looked up to see him watching me. Watching me with hellish satisfaction—or was it amusement?—lurking in the somber depths of his cold eyes.

"We have done the impossible, Cooper," he spoke with the rapt voice of one who sees an incredible vision. "We have brought a body back from the grave. We have made a man with our own hands—a man whose body should never die. We have emancipated him from the grave. Now only one thing remains; now we must pass on this boon of immortality to the rest of the humana race. Now we must create a *new* race!

"How?" he answered the question I did not dare ask. "We must provide a mate for our man. We must give him a woman—a woman of his own kind! We have the new Adam; now we must provide the new Eve—"

Like an automaton I listened. Like white-hot steel shafts his words drove into my aching brain—and when I realized the thing he intended to do, the thing he intended to make me do, utter, abysmal horror engulfed me. . . .

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Mate for the Monster

**A**LICE ADAIR was still a prisoner upstairs on the thirl floor. Alice Adair—and Olga. I visualized them lying on the operating table—and in that moment I prayed fervently for death.

But again those piercing eyes seemed to look right into my mind and read my horrified thoughts.

"We have one woman who will do very nicely—the Adair girl," Kittredge considered thoughtfully. "But we need another. Not Olga. I need her here; she is too in-

valuable to me. Not Olga, but we must find another—”

Not Olga! The sob of relief that welled up in me almost sobbed from my throat. Not Olga! That meant a reprieve for Alice Adair—and for me. We would have to wait until another woman fell into Kittredg's net; and every hour of postponement meant that something might arise to ward off that poor girl's grisly doom.

Hourly I thought of her peril and tried to plan a way to save her. Hourly, while Kittredg's eyes were on my nimble fingers as I toiled under his direction with the scalpel, I tried to think a way out for her—and always I came up against a stone wall. I could do nothing against that devil; I was so helpless—and then I knew that I had failed utterly; that the ghastly climax was close at hand.

A telephone call for the doctor gave me my first hint of the impending crisis. What it was about I did not know, but soon after that he called Irving Haskins—and I heard him telling the gas station man to meet a train. Someone was coming to our death-house—someone who was destined to take her place on our grisly operating tables!

I did not need Kittredg's sharpened scrutiny to tell me that I had guessed right. I did not need the dosing he forced upon me to tell me that murder was again on the schedule. I *knew*—and I waited with fearful trepidation until I caught the sound of Haskins' wheezy Ford; until the thumping of the door-knocker rang in my head like the toll of doom.

Frozen with dread, my blood congealing ice in my veins, I walked to the door and opened it—and stood there, motionless, speechless with horror.

There across the threshold stood Ruth Meredith!

For a moment she hesitated there, her hand clasped to her breast, her eyes wide, staring at me in shocked amazement. I heard a little gasp of pity escape from her

lips, and then impulsively she came toward me, her hand reaching for me, clutching my shoulder.

“Barry, darling—what is the matter?” she implored. “Why do you look at me like that? Why haven't you answered my letters? I couldn't stay away any longer. I felt that something was wrong and I had to come to find out for myself. Barry—*—speak to me!*”

But I could not utter a syllable. I could only stand there like a mummy and stare at her blankly—while all hell raged in my panic-ridden brain. Ruth—*she* was to be the next victim! Diabolically Godfrey Kittredg had lured her there to her doom! He had confiscated the letters she sent me; had known that my silence would alarm her—would bring her headlong into his death-trap!

“Barry—speak to me, do you hear?” she fairly screamed, as some inkling of what had happened to me must have dawned upon her.

It was Dr. Kittredg who spoke. I heard his booming voice coming down the hall, and then he was there beside me, was gently taking Ruth's hands off my shoulders and was leading her inside.

“Barry isn't quite well,” I heard him soothing her. “He—”

“Oh, I feared this!” Ruth's shocked voice interrupted him. “He was not well when he came. I tried to persuade him to rest, but he insisted on coming to work with you.”

“And it is well that he did,” Kittredg assured her. “Mere rest would have been of no avail. He needed careful treatments, and I have been giving him them. Don't worry, Miss Meredith; he is coming along nicely.”

Coming along nicely . . . . His mocking words drove me into a frenzy, a frenzy of impotence that fed furiously upon itself. I heard him tell her not to try to make me talk; I saw the pitying look her loving eyes turned upon me—and I could do

nothing. Nothing! Nothing, while the girl I loved more than life itself was being mocked and played with by a murderous monster. Like a man in a dream I had to watch and was powerless to prevent what I knew was going to happen.

**H**ELPLESSLY I had to sit down to dinner with them, had to watch Ruth eating food that I wanted to snatch from her lips, had to watch her drinking liquid that I wanted to dash into that Machiavellian devil's smiling face. I had to watch the drowsiness steal over her, the flash of fear that blazed for a moment in her eyes before they closed—and then Kittredge was beside her, lifting her in his arms before she crumpled and fell off the chair.

"At last our waiting is over, Cooper," he exulted, as he started toward the laboratory. "At last we can go ahead with our work!"

He was all eagerness; like a child impatient to start playing with a new toy. He lifted Ruth onto one of the tables, and then he had me by the arm, was urging me upstairs with him—to get the other victim. Eagerly he unlocked the door of Alice Adair's room and switched on the light—and I saw that he already had made his preparations.

The Adair girl lay on her bed, clad only in a nightgown. But she was not asleep; she was unconscious. Drugged, all ready to be taken downstairs to her doom. We

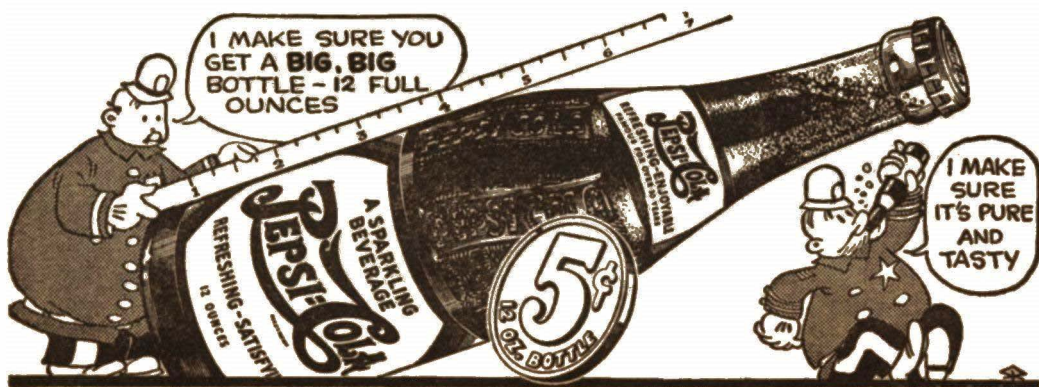
lifted her and carried her between us: carried her into the laboratory—and then into the side room where Kittredge had been at work by himself several days.

In a glance I saw what had been keeping him so occupied. In the center of the little room stood what looked like an electric chair; a chair that was wired to a heavy control box on the wall. Quickly he propped the unconscious girl in it, strapped her arms and legs, fixed an electrode to her calf and dropped a black metal hood over her head. Then he danced over to the control box.

"This chair is deadlier than any in a legal execution chamber," he chortled. "When I pull this lever twenty-five hundred volts will pass through her and in a few seconds she will be as dead as Joe Gannon was. Just a plunge into eternity—and then we will snatch her back out of it, Cooper, you and I."

His hand pressed down on the lever, and I heard the hum, the mounting whine, of the deadly current. I saw the girl's body stiffen, strain against the straps—and then the taut body sagged limply, and I knew that she was dead.

Alice Adair was dead, but this black-hearted necromancer would bring her back to life, assurance whispered in my brain. He would bring *her* back to life, but not my Ruth. My satanical scalpel would plunge Ruth into the grave—and there she would stay, while the brain I



filched from her skull would go on existing horribly . . . .

No! No! Never that! I would plunge the scalpel into my own breast first, I vowed—and I knew that I was lying. I knew that I would do just what this murdering fiend compelled me to do. Despising myself utterly, I helped him carry the girl's limp body into the laboratory and lay it out on the electrical-equipped table.

Like a devilish tempter he was there beside me, was handing me the scalpel and the trephine, was watching me like a hawk while I performed the delicate operation. Every moment he watched—but now I hardly felt his boring eyes, hardly heard his impatient, low-spoken commands.

Something was pounding in my head like a great tomtom. I could not think, could hardly see. A single note, like a tomtom's—but not the usual *boom, boom, boom*. No—I recognized it now. That pounding was a monosyllable that was growing louder each moment.

*Ruth! Ruth! Ruth!* Ruth, who trusted me; Ruth, who loved me; Ruth, who had come here because of her anxiety for me . . . *Ruth! Ruth! Ruth!*

Godfrey Kittredge was back at my side, was tugging impatiently at my arm. Alice Adair's empty skull was ready, waiting for its new tenant. He urged me over to the table where Ruth lay, barely breathing, her lovely face ashen pale. He thrust the horrible murder implements toward me—and something cracked in my brain. I went berserk.

*Ruth! Ruth!* The maddening tomtom still thundered in my skull, and suddenly it had momentarily freed me from his hellish domination. I hurled myself at him, knocked him out of my way, and raced out of the laboratory.

I KNEW that I could not hope to match my strength against his; knew that he would have me subdued again in a few

moments—but a wild plan had burst in my brain. I knew how to save Ruth! Kittredge wanted me to murder her only to provide a mate for that monster upstairs—but if the monster were no more, the mate would be useless!

Crazy, crack-brained reasoning, of course—but at that moment it seemed to me a heaven-sent inspiration, and I acted upon it. Upstairs in the hallway I had seen a heavy chair. I seized it and ran with it to the door of the graveling's room, raised it over my hand and crashed it against the panels.

The chair smashed into kindling, but one leg battered through a panel—and then the door flew open.

For an instant I gaped in astonishment—and in that instant the corpse-monster came charging through the doorway. There was something queer about his face; something unnatural, as if the transplanted features had not been grafted properly . . . That much I glimpsed as he bore down upon me; and then I knew I was battling for my life with a thing that could not be killed!

His big fist lashed out and caught me on the side of the head; knocked me spinning, to trip and topple to the floor. And then he bore down on me, coming in to batter me to death.

There was no use pounding his flesh, no use trying to choke him, realization flashed swiftly through my mind. He was insensible to pain. His body could not be killed—but I knew what could be. The brain I had put into his empty skull! That was the only part of him that was mortal—the Achilles' heel of that appalling monster created by a new Frankenstein!

In that split-second I acted. Subconsciously I must have noticed a leg of the shattered chair in which part of a broken rung was still embedded, like the head of a tomahawk. I snatched it up as I leaped to my feet, snatched it up and brought it down over the corpse-monster's head—

and heard the skull crack as the sharp-pointed rung clove through the bone and into the brain beneath.

The creature's howl of agony was blood-curdling. It rang in my ears as he staggered back and crashed to the floor—and then it was echoed by a yell of consummate rage.

"Damn you—you murdering fool!" Godfrey Kitteredge bellowed as he catapulted himself upon me.

Vainly I tried to bring down the chair-leg over his head, but he tore it out of my grasp and his big fist smashed into my face. Before I could tumble to the floor he seized me and slammed me back against the wall and pounded me unmercifully. The last thing I remembered as I lost consciousness was the glare of those blazing eyes boring insanely into mine—eyes that glinted with demoniacal fury and that promised me hell on earth for what I had done . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Ultimate Horror

**H**ELL ON EARTH—that is what that vengeful fiend promised; and that is what he gave me. That is what he meted out to me during the hours when I was at his mercy—when I lay helpless on his operating table.

Hell on earth—that is mine now; for *I am Frankenstein's monster!*

The moment I came back to my senses I knew that an inexplicable change had come over me; a change that filled me with a horrible, primitive dread, that made the hair at the nape of my neck bristle like an animal's. I felt different—my face, my body; all of me.

My fingers strayed wonderingly to my face, passed over it—and told me that my cheekbones were higher than they had ever been, told me that my lower jaw was fuller, that there was a mole on my right

cheek just above the corner of my mouth.

*A mole on my right cheek!* Frantically I felt for it again, rubbed my fingers over it—and cold sweat bathed me from head to foot. Of their own volition my hands went to the jacket of my pajamas, lifted it—and bulging-eyed I stared at the ugly scar on my abdomen; *at the livid scar a knife had left on Joe Gannon's belly!*

Joe Gannon's scar . . . Talbot Wilson's mole . . . Abject terror seized me as I reached icy-tipped fingers to the line of my hair, ran them down the sides of my face, under my chin to my throat—and traced the barely detectable scar-line where I had grafted Talbot Wilson's face onto the re-animated corpse of Joe Gannon . . .

*I was that frightful graveling, that ghastly composite of death!*

Horror swept me as the appalling significance of my discovery confronted me. I sank back on my elbows on the bed—and a malignant laugh mocked me from the doorway. Godfrey Kitteredge! He had slipped silently into the room while I was absorbed with my shocking explorations, and now he strode toward me, stood beside the bed and glared down at me.

And in that moment I knew what he had done as surely as if I had watched him—as surely as if I had stood in the laboratory and supervised while he excised my brain and transplanted it into the skull of the monster I had slain; Slowly I raised my hand to my head. Even before my fingers reached it I knew that my scalp was sore, and then I felt the tightly packed dressing that covered the whole crown of my head—the whole crown of Joe Gannon's head where my sharp-pointed bludgeon had penetrated the skull!

"I see you understand," that jubilant fiend leered down at me. "But don't look so shocked about it. You left me no other course, you know. When you drove that spike through Gannon's skull you threatened to destroy my life work. I could

not let you do that—and so I utilized you. But you are fortunate, my dear Cooper—the most fortunate man in all history. It is better this way, far better. As it was, we should have had to share the credit for creating a new race, you and I; but now each of us will have his own part, will reap his own glory.

“I shall go down in history as the man who created the new race of men, and you will be the one who fathers it! What more can you ask? Eternal life with the new Mother Eve from whom all mankind will spring! Miss Adair unfortunately died beyond hope of resurrection during the turmoil you created, but we still have the charming Miss Meredith. All we need now is another woman in whom to transplant her brain. Time is short. We cannot wait to lure one here, so I am going to send you out to bring one in.”

I wanted to throw myself upon him and tear him to pieces—and I knew he dominated me so completely that I could not lift a hand against him! Horror and soul-wracking despair enveloped me so completely at that moment that I knew hell could have no worse torments than I was enduring. To know that now I was the noisome grave-creature I had loathed. To know that Ruth was a helpless captive in the clutches of this madman. To know that I could not even hope to destroy myself in order to save her.

My cup of bitterness ran over at that moment, but out of my abject wretchedness desperation distilled the glimmering of a plan that I carefully shielded from his keen, constantly probing eyes.

**H**E SENT me out that afternoon, but before I left he drugged me thoroughly and stood me, back against a wall, while his devilish eyes bored into mine like gimlets that penetrated to my very soul.

“You are coming right back, you understand,” he repeated. “You are coming back with a woman. If you try to escape

or try to bring anyone to interfere, the Meredith girl will be unrecognizable when she is found.”

Yes, I was coming back; there was no question about that. I was coming back with the woman he demanded; that was part of my plan.

About a mile from Kitteredge’s place I found the woman I wanted. I had seen others, but they were alone, and I did not want that. This one was young, about eighteen. She came to the kitchen door when I knocked and asked for a drink of water. I heard the voice of children in the room beyond her, saw them peeking out at me from behind her skirts. After I had drunk I asked her if there was anything I could do around the place for a bite to eat. I lured her out into the yard to point out possible chores—and then I grabbed her.

I threw her down and lashed a rope around her arms and then stifled her screams with a gag I forced between her jaws: With a sharp-pointed scalpel I had brought from Kitteredge’s jabbed into her back, I forced her out into the road, forced her to run with me—while the children started a hullabaloo behind us. She begged piteously for mercy, but I forced her on inexorably; forced her to run until she sank exhausted in the road; forced her to hide in the brush with me until she was able to gather her strength and go on.

The pursuit was after us even more swiftly that I expected. The Kitteredge house was barely in sight when I caught the sound of State Troopers’ sirens growing louder momentarily. We ran for it, as fast as I could force the terrified girl to move, and had no more than reached the door when the leading cars came roaring up the driveway.

The door opened to my hand, but nobody came to greet me. Quickly I thrust the girl inside and locked the door after us. Where was Kitteredge? I shouted his name, but there was no answer—and then



the girl's shrill scream brought me up short. She had freed her arms and torn the gag from her mouth. Now she was backed against the foot of the stairway, her widespread hands held up in front of her eyes to shut out the sight of a body that lay stretched in a pool of blood on the floor.

The body of a man, sprawled on his face. The top of his head was battered in, a bloody horror. He was not Kittredge. That much I saw at a glance, and before I had time to investigate further, men were pounding at the front door, were shouting in the rear, were smashing a way in through the windows.

Grabbing the girl by an arm, I dragged her upstairs. Before we reached the third floor heavy footsteps were pounding through the lower hallway, gruff voices were shouting back and forth. They were starting up the stairs, calling for me to surrender.

Swiftly I shoved the cowering girl into a hall chair and warned her to stay there, while I barricaded furniture from the nearest rooms and piled it in a barricade at the head of the stairs. An angry crowd gathered on the second floor, started up the stairs; but the light table and chairs I hurled down upon them drove them back with yells of rage.

Where was Kittredge? Where was Ruth? The devil had her hidden somewhere in the building, and I had to hold off that mob until they had ransacked the place and found her. After that, nothing mattered—but first I wanted to be certain that Ruth was safely out of his hands.

Three times I drove them back when they tried to storm my barricade; three times I braved a shower of missiles and bullets to send furniture crashing down upon them.

"Kill him! Lynch the murdering devil! Drag him down! Burn the skunk out!" A bedlam of howls came up to me—and then I caught the first wisp of smoke.

"Fire!" the sobbing girl shrieked. "The house is on fire! We'll be burned alive!"

NOW there was no mistaking the choking clouds that came billowing up the stairway. For a moment I hesitated, but I could no longer imperil her. I pushed hard against the barricade, sent most of it crashing down the stairs as if by accident—but leaving the way clear for her to race to safety. And then I fled down the hall to the room that had been my virtual cell, locked the door and piled furniture against it.

That is where I am as I finish writing this account.

The smoke is much thicker now. It is creeping in under the door and choking me, blinding my eyes so that I can scarcely see to write. Soon the whole building will be in flames and I will perish—which is all that I ask, for it is not fitting that an unholy creature such as Godfrey Kittredge has made me should go on living.

But before I die I want to leave a record so that the whole world will know the true character of the eminent Dr. Kittredge. That is why I have been writing this journal, adding to it from day to day. It is almost finished now—almost ready to be thrown out of the window with a prayer that it will be found and read by those it should reach.

The smoke is blinding—choking. It is strangling me, roaring and pounding in my head—but no, that pounding is on my door. They are trying to smash it in, trying to drag me out and lynch me before the flames can reach me. I tried to reach the window just now and fell on the floor. I can't get up. I can barely move my fingers to write. This is the end. I must be dying—or am I already dead?

That must be why I hear Ruth calling me. High and clear above the pounding I hear her voice calling, "Barry! Barry darling! . . ."

Transcript of the Testimony of Private Detective Matthew O'Connor Before the Grand Jury Investigating the Death of Arnold Ritchie

*Question:* Mr. O'Connor, by whom were you employed to make an investigation of this case?

*Answer:* I was engaged by Miss Ruth Meredith.

*Question:* Can you tell us what prompted Miss Meredith to engage your services?

*Answer:* Because she was not satisfied with the explanations she had been given for the peculiar behavior of Dr. Barry Cooper and for the strange occurrences that took place before and after she arrived in Halstead.

*Question:* When did you begin your investigation?

*Answer:* The day after Dr. Cooper was arrested.

*Question:* Will you please give the jury a brief account of what you discovered?

*Mr. O'Connor:* The first thing I heard about when I arrived in Halstead was the extraordinary confession that had been found lying on the floor beside Dr. Cooper when he was rescued from the smoke-filled room in which he was arrested. Most people thought it proved that he was crazy, but when I obtained permission to read it one thing about it immediately struck me as queer. Dr. Cooper claimed to be working with Dr. Godfrey Kittredge—and I was almost certain I had read somewhere that Dr. Kittredge was in Europe.

I checked up and found that this was so. I checked up farther and found that there was no gas station two miles from the Thornhill place, where Godfrey Kittredge was supposed to be located; nor was there any Irving Haskins in Halstead. Checking up with Hollywood, I could find no record of a Talbot Wilson or an Alice Adair. Something seemed to be decidedly wrong about the whole set-up.

So I had a talk with this "Dr. Kittredge." He admitted his name wasn't Kittredge. Said he was Dr. Morgan Delamare; that he had agreed to pose as Dr. Kittredge so that young Dr. Cooper, who needed rest badly, would come out and live with him for a while. He claimed that Cooper's story was all nonsense, the ravings of a brilliant mind that had gone all to pieces because of overwork.

I wasn't satisfied with that. I got a snapshot of Delamare and checked it with the New York police, and they identified him as Dr. Carl Schroeder, a surgeon formerly connected with the Meredith Memorial Hospital who had lost his license because of malpractice—something about hypnotizing his patients and getting them to do things they had no intention of doing. Back I hopped to Halstead—and this time Delamare, or Schroeder, came clean when I put the screws on him.

He admitted that the whole thing was a frame-up. Jasper, Olga, Haskins, Wilson and the Adair girl were stooges he hired to play their parts. The "victims" Dr. Cooper operated on were corpses shipped out to Halstead from the Meredith Memorial. Dr. Cooper was kept doped and in an advanced stage of hypnosis all the while he was there—all as part of a scheme to drive him insane.

The man who concocted that scheme was Lyman Ritchie, Miss Meredith's guardian. He saw that she was in love with Dr. Cooper and was determined to marry him—instead of marrying Ritchie's son, Arnold, as he wanted her to. Worse than that, Miss Meredith realized that her fortune was driving Dr. Cooper away from her. Rather than let it ruin her life, she had decided to get rid of it. She had asked Ritchie for an accounting so that she could turn the estate over to charities—but an accounting meant ruin for Ritchie; meant that his mismanagement and embezzlement would be exposed.

So he desperately planned to get rid

of Cooper, the root of all his trouble. He knew the doctor's health was poor because of over-work, so he figured it would be easy to work on him and drive him crazy. If that had happened, Cooper would have been stuck away in an asylum. "Dr. Kittredge" would have disappeared, Miss Meredith would have been bullied into marrying Arnold Ritchie, or at least would have given up the idea of disposing of her estate—and the Ritchie financial blow-up would have been averted.

Things went haywire when Dr. Cooper got out of hand and went upstairs to kill the man he thought was Joe Gannon's revived corpse. That "Joe Gannon" was actually Arnold Ritchie, masquerading with a clever makeup. He was taking a hand in the game to keep an eye on Schroeder and see that everything went off on schedule—and he got his skull smashed for doing it.

Ritchie's death changed everything. Schroeder was scared. He saw himself faced with exposure as an imposter—and maybe even held for murder. He thought hard, and came up with the inspiration of making Dr. Cooper believe that *he* was the revived corpse. Between the drugs and Schroeder's constant hypnotic control Cooper didn't have a chance—but even that wasn't enough. Schroeder planted a wart on his right cheek—with a paraffin injection under the skin and cauterizing on the surface. He faked the scar on the doctor's stomach and raised a faint welt all around his face by tracing a line with an electric needle.

With this apparently unmistakable corroboration of his fears, Dr. Cooper was certain that his brain had been transplanted into Gannon's corpse—and then Schroeder added the finishing touches to his scheme. He sent Cooper out to kidnap a woman and bring the countryside down on his head, while he, Schroeder, got Miss Meredith out of the house and then hur-

ried to the police to report Cooper's murder of young Ritchie.

*Question:* Where had Miss Meredith been until then?

*Answer:* Schroeder had kept her doped and locked in a room after pretending to force Dr. Cooper to operate on her. As soon as Cooper was out of the house, he revived her and rushed her away. He told her Cooper had gone stark mad, that he had been a captive like her and had just managed to get loose. That was the story he told the police in Halstead, with Miss Meredith having to half-way back him up. They came back with him to arrest a dangerous homicidal lunatic—and found him supposedly holding another victim he had just kidnaped.

The scheme would have worked, except for Miss Meredith's faith in her man. Dr. Cooper would have been branded a maniac and no attention would have been paid to anything he might say, except for the fact that she could not believe him capable of such crimes, sane or insane. When she got hold of me and I got hold of that "confession" the whole thing began to unravel—so fast that before we could reach Lyman Ritchie he had committed suicide.

That's about all I can tell you about the death of Arnold Ritchie, gentlemen—and now, if I may—

*Question:* One thing more, Mr. O'Connor. How is Dr. Cooper now?

*Answer:* Excellent. He is in the Halstead hospital, where Miss Meredith has been with him constantly. He has been pronounced entirely sane and is recuperating rapidly from what was nearly a nervous breakdown. I have a date there in about an hour—they think I ought to be their best man; and your exoneration would be about the nicest wedding present I could bring them.

*The Grand Jury so voted—and added its congratulations.*

# LOST!

by E. G. MORRIS

*I spring toward the child, panting and cowering like a wildcat beast....*



*As first I refused to listen, but as the stranger unfolded his tale of horror, I knew that he was warning me of the unspeakable doom which already was being prepared for my wife and me!*

**W**HEN HE SAT down at my table in the cafeteria I didn't pay much attention to him. Then I felt he was looking at me and I was a little sore. After all, there were plenty of vacant tables and I never could understand why some people seemed anxious to barge in and bother you when you were tired and hungry.

I took the silverware out of the napkin, looked up and saw he was gazing at me intently. I stared back, thinking he might

look away, but he continued to look into my eyes.

"I hope you don't mind," he said after a moment, "but there's something I want to say—" His voice surprised me. It didn't go with the shabby clothes or the "hang-dog" look. There was pride and breeding in his tone.

"Listen, buddy," I interrupted, "I can't stop you from sitting here if you want to—but I don't have to listen to any sob story; I haven't any money to spare, and

if I had, you wouldn't get it. Now is that settled?"

He didn't seem disturbed at all, just kept looking at me as though it was important for me to listen.

"I want you to do me a favor," he whispered, and an urgency in his voice made me wait. "No, I don't want any money, but I do want you to hear me out. Then I'll leave it up to you."

After all I had been warned that Greenwich Village was full of freaks, and since Jane and I had that day just moved into the neighborhood I might as well get used to it.

"Okay, pal," I grinned, "you win, but make it fast, will you? And how about a cup of Java?"

"No," he shook his head. "Just listen to me." That decided me, I think. He began to talk, and before long I wasn't eating, and I had thought I was hungry!

**MY WIFE** and I—he said—came to New York five years ago from the South. It's unimportant as to the state we came from or why. I had a good job, we were very much in love and I don't think there was ever anyone as happy as we were. Anyone.

For a while we lived at a residential hotel in the Seventies, but I knew a few people in this part of town and we decided to get an apartment. We had a lot of fun preparing to set up housekeeping. We dreamed dreams and we planned plans.

Some women are cut out to be artists, some seem wonderful mothers, some are worthless, but Marian was the perfect wife. Perfect. She was beautiful, with eyes that were pools of yellow sunlight and hair as black as death. All this beauty was for one man, because she had a soul that was as clean as light and I was lucky enough to be her husband.

Being the sort of person she was, she got a tremendous kick out of shopping for furniture, out of looking at apartments.

Every day when I left the office she would be waiting for me, and I would have to trot around inspecting places she had seen. My salary was fair, but rents in the Village were high, and it was hard to find just what we wanted.

It was exactly five years ago today that Marian found just the apartment we wanted. Five years ago today. In a way I was sorry, because it had been so much fun walking around together and learning the neighborhood. Everything we did together was fun.

The place she found was in a little dead-end street that was only two blocks in length. There was a big modern apartment at the end of the street, there was the usual Chinese laundry and a factory of some sort. Most of the houses were about a hundred years old, I should judge, brick with high, narrow windows. They were like old books brought from another land; they had stories to tell, those houses.

It was the type of street we both loved, rich in tradition and authentic atmosphere; and the building to which Marian took me was obviously the oldest in the street.

It was late summer, a little after seven o'clock. I remember we had dinner in this same cafeteria after she met me at the office, but she could hardly eat she was so excited. I loved to hear Marian talk because she had one of the few pleasing Southern accents I have ever heard. She slurred her syllables, yet every word was clear and soft like a little curled wave.

There was a note by one of the bells saying the superintendent would be back shortly and Marian and I stood on the high stoop, happy because we liked the location and because we were young and in love.

It was still light with the hazy sunshine of summer, and I remember thinking how good it was to be alive. Then the old woman came along.

She was walking along the street very

rapidly, peering at each house and muttering and shaking her head. She had on a flowered dress of some sort and a tattered shawl around her shoulders, hot as the weather was. I don't know why I kept looking at her. She was opposite us now, and she paused, peering intently at the house. She smiled and the sun glinted on the gold in her earrings and the gold in her mouth. Then she walked up the steps and stood close.

There was something evil about her. I sensed it even then. Her wrinkled cheeks were stained, her clawlike hands not graceful or even pitiful, yet she was indescribably old; and about her like a mantle hung a musty odor, a wet fetid odor like that from a sluggish river.

She talked to me, but her monkey eyes were on Marian. "You people looka for da apartment?" she asked, and I drew back because her hand had nearly touched mine. I didn't want to touch her.

"I SPOKE with the superintendent today," Marian said, and as always her voice was pleasant. "He showed me an apartment on the top floor."

The old lady rubbed her hands together with a rasping sound, edged closer to Marian. I could see Marian was scared. It might seem silly that two adults would be frightened by this little old woman, but there was a power about her one could feel.

"I know, I know," the old woman put her hand on Marian's and I saw my wife's face grow pale, saw her eyes widen as she drew back. "Super, he can't come. I gotta the keys, I show apartment, yet?"

I felt then that I wouldn't take an apartment in that building if they gave it to me free, but after all, what could I say? There we were, obviously waiting to see the place. I shrugged my shoulders, and the old woman, muttering to herself, drew out a big bunch of keys and opened the front door.

The hall was surprisingly dark, but I could see the proud sweep of the stairway, with its polished balustrade and the wide, softly carpeted stairs. The place, as well as I could judge, was very clean, yet through it all permeated that dreadful odor of decay. We followed the old woman up the stairs.

Apparently the house was deserted. There was none of the usual occupancy noises, no rattle of dishes, no blare of a radio; just heavy silence and the wet, cool smell of water.

Once, after we had turned from the second floor and were on a narrower stair I thought I heard a whisper. It was as though someone had leaned close to me and tried to speak a hurried, whispered message. I stopped short, and the old woman who was just ahead of me also stopped. Her eyes were cat eyes in the dark, and she put her hand on mine. Her hand was as cold as Winter, and I could sense the indomitable strength of her fingers. But what could I do, what earthly excuse could I have given for not going on?

We reached the top floor and the old woman opened the door. There were no lights, but enough seeped in from outside to make me understand why Marian had wanted this place. The front door led directly into the living room, a long, low room, with a skylight to the street and dormer windows at the side.

There was a huge fireplace that took up half a wall, and along the other two walls were bookshelves. But the place was furnished, completely furnished and I couldn't understand that.

I heard a gasp from Marian, saw that she was gazing about her, her hand at her white throat.

"There must be some mistake," she said. "This isn't the apartment I saw today—I can't understand it." She turned to me and I was worried by the fear in her eyes. "The place I saw today was

entirely different—and the furniture!" She made a futile little gesture. "The apartment I saw was unfurnished."

The old woman was watching her, leaning forward, her hand close to Marian's arm.

"Lady," she whispered, ignoring me completely, "you like bambina, maybe—children? You like to see little children happy, yes?" A breathless expectancy hung about her question, and for some reason I glanced across the room, saw above the mantel the charming portrait of two grave children, a boy and a girl.

The artist had caught on canvas the eternal mysticism of childhood, the wide-eyed wonder, the lonely faith. It was a beautiful picture. Marian was looking at it, too.

"Yes," she said, softly, "I love children."

"Good!" the old woman muttered. Had her face been capable of showing human emotion I would say she seemed at once pleased and jealous. She was watching Marian closely, her eyes two glittering slits.

"In old country," she whispered, harshly, "wise people know children who die young always stay young if they have love. Sometimes own mother get tired, or go away, then children need new mother."

I COULD see that Marian was intent on what the old woman said. Her lips were parted, her eyes soft, and she had never seemed quite so beautiful as at that moment.

"Little children," the old woman nodded her head emphatically, "they are of nature. They want to play, play all the time. They not care what they take, who they hurt. If a doll break they throw it away, get new doll. If the mother, if she have no more to give children from own soul, those children they need new mother. This time year they get restless, need

more—you know about children, yes?"

Marian's eyes were on the portrait above the mantel, and suddenly with surprising strength the old woman was pulling Marian toward the door into the other room. "You come quick now," she commanded. "I show you something."

I had stood, mute, puzzled. Now, I made a quick movement and my foot struck something and I slipped, nearly fell. I glanced down, saw that a child's toy wagon was lying there as though left when its owner was called from play. I heard the door slam then, and I looked up. Marian and the old woman had gone into the other room and the door was closed.

I cannot explain what made me so afraid, but I rushed across the room. I beat upon the door and I called Marian's name. It must have been nearly a minute before my sudden panic subsided enough to think of trying the knob, but the door was locked, tight.

I fought with that door as though it were alive, beating at it, moaning and pulling at the knob. Then, breathing furiously, sweat streaming from my face, I stepped back. I flung myself at the door, but it was like steel plate. Time after time I threw my full weight against it to no avail. I stood there, after a time, hearing nothing but the heavy rasp of my own breathing; and then I heard the sound of someone coming up the stairway outside.

It seemed to me that a great stillness had wrapped itself around the world, that the only sound in all consciousness was the sound of someone coming slowly up the stairs.

I half turned, like an animal that hears a sound in the jungle, and I noticed that the room was growing darker as though whatever was coming up the stairs needed darkness.

And as I stood there, peering back over my shoulder with the steps coming closer and closer, I gradually became aware of

reality. Once more I felt as though I were in a real world, could feel the sweat on my face, could hear the evidence of the world outside.

Every little twilight sound beat into my brain. The hum of traffic from the Avenue, the rattle of an El train blocks away, the shout of someone on the street, my heart beating.

But above it all was the sound of someone coming.

I tried to fool myself, I tried to believe it would be the superintendent, that he would explain his wife had made a mistake, that she didn't understand, that it was simple to open the door, to get Marian out and hold her again in my arms. I tried to fool myself, but as the door from the hall swung slowly open, I was unable to move, and I noticed, stronger than ever, the damp, cool smell of sluggish water.

I had heard of the power of fear which could chill one's blood and render the muscles incapable of movement. I experienced that now. As the hall door slowly opened I don't think I could have moved if a beast from hell had entered. But no terrible spectre came into the room, instead I saw that a child was standing there in the doorway gazing at me solemnly.

It was obviously the boy of the picture above the mantel, but there was an unutterable difference, for in these eyes there was no faith. Loneliness was there, and an ancient and evil wisdom; but there was no soul behind that gaze, only the blank stare one sees upon the countenance of a lunatic, or a very, very wise old man.

I tried to speak, I remember I reached out one trembling hand in a furtive little gesture, but the child seemed to be listening, listening to sounds I couldn't hear which came from behind that invulnerable door into the inner room.

I noticed then that the clothing worn by the boy was indescribably old in texture and design, and I saw that it was dripping wet, and that there was mud, and the

fragments of grasses caught in the slimy hair of this child.

I believe it was then I began to really understand, and a moan burst from between my clenched teeth.

**T**HE boy laughed, his teeth flashing white and dead, so that his face had a skull-like cast, and he said: "The lady, is she in the nursery?"

Possibly it was the sound of a voice that broke the spell. I sprang toward the child, panting and snarling like a stricken beast, but he stepped nimbly aside; not so much in fear, but more as if this were some dread game he was bound to win.

As I think of it now I do believe the child was playing with me. Most terrible of all was the utter absence of sound except for the scuffing of my feet on the floor, and the heavy rasp of my breathing. The child made no sound at all, and no stain from the water appeared on the rug.

I think I knew what the outcome would be. As the child maneuvered so I was away from the door, he darted quickly across the room, flung open the door I had been unable to budge, and I caught a quick glimpse of the inner room.

The sight stopped me as though I had run flush into a massive wall. The room was a nursery, there were playthings scattered about, there were childish pictures on the walls. There was a fireplace with a wood fire burning cheerfully, yet the room exuded a rush of chill, fetid air.

In the center of the room was a little group. The old woman stood holding the hand of a little girl who stared at me unseeingly, and Marian was seated on the floor, in her eyes the same vacant look I had seen in the eyes of the boy, in her hands was a pitiful little furry kitten.

How can I explain I knew that the only thing alive in that room was the kitten? There was something in its eyes as it tried to escape which was different from the look in the eyes of anyone in that room.



Different from the look in the beautiful eyes of Marian, my wife. Her eyes held only evil wisdom and a horrible hunger that made me turn my gaze away, that made my heart stop for a moment its throbbing beat.

I think I must have gone a little crazy then. I remember I screamed Marian's name, I remember how I crashed toward that open door and how the little boy closed it against my weight, closed it as easily as though I weren't there.

I don't remember a great deal after that. I know I shouted, I know people came into the room, and there were momentary flashes when with crawling fear I realized the room I stood in was bare, and different and long unoccupied.

One thing is very clear. When the police came and when the door to the other room was open, I was aware of the dank smell of sluggish water, and I was aware, too, that there was excitement about a kitten found there. They said it must have come up the back fire-escape, but they couldn't explain what had killed it, **what had broken its neck.**

They **knew** I couldn't have done that, because there was no way I could have got into the room **save through that door, and the door had been locked and bolted.**

They led me away, and for a little while I was treated kindly. The superintendent of the building remembered that my wife had been there alone that afternoon. He

wasn't married, knew nothing of the old woman, or of any children.

Apparently the top floor was the only vacant one in the building, and when the other tenants were questioned, **none** could be found who had seen me or Marian. **none** had heard a sound from that top floor.

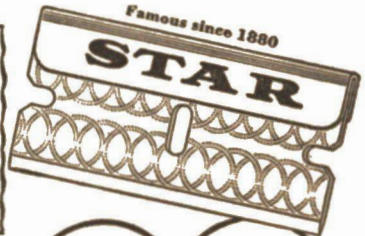
All this I learned during the weary hours while they questioned me, while doctors poked at me and men with hard eyes and sneering lips called me a liar and a killer.

I learned too that the top floor had been vacant for several years. The last tenant had been a young girl whose body was found on one of the beaches, just about this time of year, after she had been missing for several weeks. The case had caused a minor excitement in the neighborhood, had been forgotten until now.

**O**VER and over I told my story, over and over I begged the police to do something about Marian, but the more I babbled the sterner their questions became. The next few days were horrible. My record was checked, Marian's movements traced. A man at the office was found who had heard me arguing with someone over the phone. It was useless for me to claim this had been a business conversation. The police were convinced I had killed my wife, had become temporarily insane.



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But they couldn't hold me. There was no evidence, there was no body. I was released. I was allowed to go back to that house, and in broad daylight I climbed the stairs, looked through the vacant apartment. I think I would have doubted my own sanity then except for one thing. Behind the radiator in the back room there had rolled a gay little button. I knew what it was, it was a button from the blue print dress Marian had been wearing. I spoke to no one about it.

That was the last time I was ever in the house. I became known as a nut in the neighborhood. The cab drivers, the pool room loafers, everyone kidded me. They said my wife had gone off with another man, that I was crazy with jealousy. After a while I became a joke; no one would listen to me. The superintendent had orders never to allow me in that house.

But during that time I learned certain things. I heard of the man across the street from the house, the man whose wife had disappeared fifteen years before after speaking of the lonely little children who wanted her to play with them.

And one old man I met, he remembered that when he was young he had heard a story about the house, about a family who had lived there. There was something about the father who drank and who abused the children. And then one day, out of a small boat, something had happened. No one knew just what, but it was said the mother could have saved her children but she let them drown, drowned with them. Their bodies were never recovered—only the father was found. There were bruises about his face and throat, when his body washed ashore. That's the story I heard, about the drowning of the children—just about this time, many years ago.

Well, you know now why I wanted to talk to you, why I had to talk to you tonight. I'm tired, so tired. My money's

all gone and I have no place to go, but I guess I don't care as much as I used to—but you—I thought you ought to know . . .

WHAT I had heard pounded against the bulwark of my common sense and I pushed away my plate, grabbed for my check. "Come on," I said, and we left the cafeteria together. Out in busy Sheridan Square a semblance of reason came back to me.

After all, this might just be a dodge to get a handout. This guy could have seen me and Jane talking to the old Italian woman, he could have known about the apartment, the way it was furnished. But he couldn't have known that I too had felt the horror of that old woman's gaze. I knew I must not let Jane get into that house. I must get to her in time.

We didn't talk very much as we hurried along Seventh Avenue. We passed Barrow, cut into the little dead-end street, and I was aware that my companion was panting, that he was half-running to keep up with my quick stride. Once a couple got in our way and I shoved the man rudely aside, heard the woman's indignant tirade, but we didn't stop.

Through the suspicion of this man's story, through the realization that I must have been played for some sort of a sucker, ran a motif I couldn't ignore. I must keep Jane out of that apartment. She had gone uptown to get our bags, I was to meet her at the new place, and I uttered an unfamiliar prayer that I get there before she did.

For if this man's story was true, if he had loved his wife, had lost her, surely he could not have loved more deeply than I. If anything ever happened to Jane . . .

I found myself running as we neared the house, but the man was close beside me. I dashed up the high, front stoop, swung open the door and started up the wide stairway.

Everything seemed strangely still as it

might have that evening five years ago.

At the turn of the stairs something brushed against me, and I looked back, saw the man was far behind me. He had paused, his face gleaming with sweat in the dim light, his heavy breathing clearly audible now.

And then I heard the voices and my heart stood still. I heard Jane's voice and another deeper tone. I reached the top floor.

Jane was standing on the landing and with her was a man I had never seen before. I never thought I would be happy to see Jane with an ugly, squat little man who wore paint splattered trousers and a smelly blue shirt. Certainly I never thought I would be glad to see that Jane was arguing with such a person, was on the verge of slapping his face.

She saw me and came toward me immediately with the determination of outraged dignity.

"This man says he's the superintendent," she stormed. "He says he has no wife, and that the apartment isn't even furnished, that I'm lying about the whole thing!"

She was on the edge of tears, and I could imagine how she felt, knowing how tired she was, seeing the baggage she had lugged up those long stairs.

The little man was shaking his head. He said something in Italian, then crossed himself hastily.

"You go," he shouted. "Get outta this place queeck. Please, Mister, you go, do me bigga favor, huh? I find 'partment for you, honest I will, I leave here now myself."

I could see Jane was ready to argue, and I grabbed hold of the heaviest bag, motioned for the superintendent to take the other.

"Come on, Jane," I commanded. "We can straighten this out later. Come on, get out of here." And while I spoke I felt cold, I felt damp and tired and I

know I smelled the deep, dark smell of the sea.

**T**HERE was a bitter cold draught of air, as though the front door was suddenly swung open, and I thought I heard a child's voice raised in pleading. I looked down the stairs but could see nothing of the man whose story I had heard. I saw no one, but I distinctly heard the loud slam of the front door.

I believed even then I knew what would inevitably happen. Subconsciously I could sense the dreadful pattern, and I plunged down the stairs, with Jane following angrily, still arguing with the little superintendent.

The house was very still—waiting.

Out on the street, in front of the house a crowd was already gathering. People were pushing to get a closer look at the dead man lying near the gutter. He lay there like a broken doll, like a toy a child has played with and destroyed in a senseless fit of anger. His head was at a horrible angle, it was apparent his neck was broken.

Up the street a few yards was a car, the driver hunched over the wheel, a few persons talking to him.

I walked toward the car as though I had to hear what was said, and behind me I heard the superintendent gasp. I turned and saw him cross himself again when he saw the dead man was the husband of the woman who had disappeared five years ago.

"Just take it easy," someone was saying to the man in the car. "It wasn't your fault, buddy! The guy stepped right in front of the car, I seen it."

The driver looked up, spoke through trembling lips. "It was awful, awful. I wasn't going fast, I'll swear I wasn't. There was a woman and a little boy standing across the street. I saw them distinctly. Then this—this man started from the curb, he was running toward the wom-

an and child. But I swerved, I didn't even touch him, not even with a fender. So help me God, this car never touched him."

One of the bystanders shook his head.

"Maybe it wasn't your fault, mister," he said, "but don't try and pull any stuff like that! You hit him all right. Hell, the guy's neck is broken."

The driver looked around hopelessly, as though he knew no one would believe him.

"If you could just find that woman and the little boy," he begged. "They saw it all."

"I was standing right at the corner." The officious woman, always to be found at any accident, was speaking. "I'm sure if there had been a woman and child across the street I would have seen them! There was no one there, no one!"

I walked back to where Jane was standing. The accident seemed to have taken all the fight out of her, and I saw that she was pale and shaken.

"Come on," I whispered, "let's get

away from here." There was the growing sound of sirens. "The police will be here in a minute and we don't want to hang around. Let's go."

She nodded, and I picked up the bags, started toward the corner.

"I'll bet the whole thing is just a racket these janitors have," she said angrily.

"What whole thing?" I realized she was still sore about the apartment.

"I saw that old woman just as the cab stopped tonight. There was a young woman with her, a woman in a blue dress and a little boy. I'll bet that old witch rented the apartment to them, probably got a dollar or so more a week than we offered. The idea! That man claiming she wasn't his wife! How would she get the keys—how could she show me a furnished apartment and him claiming she didn't! Why he as much as called me a liar."

"Let's forget it, Jane," I said. "Let's just try hard to forget it." But I knew that I never could forget. . . .



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# Bodies Born for Slaughter

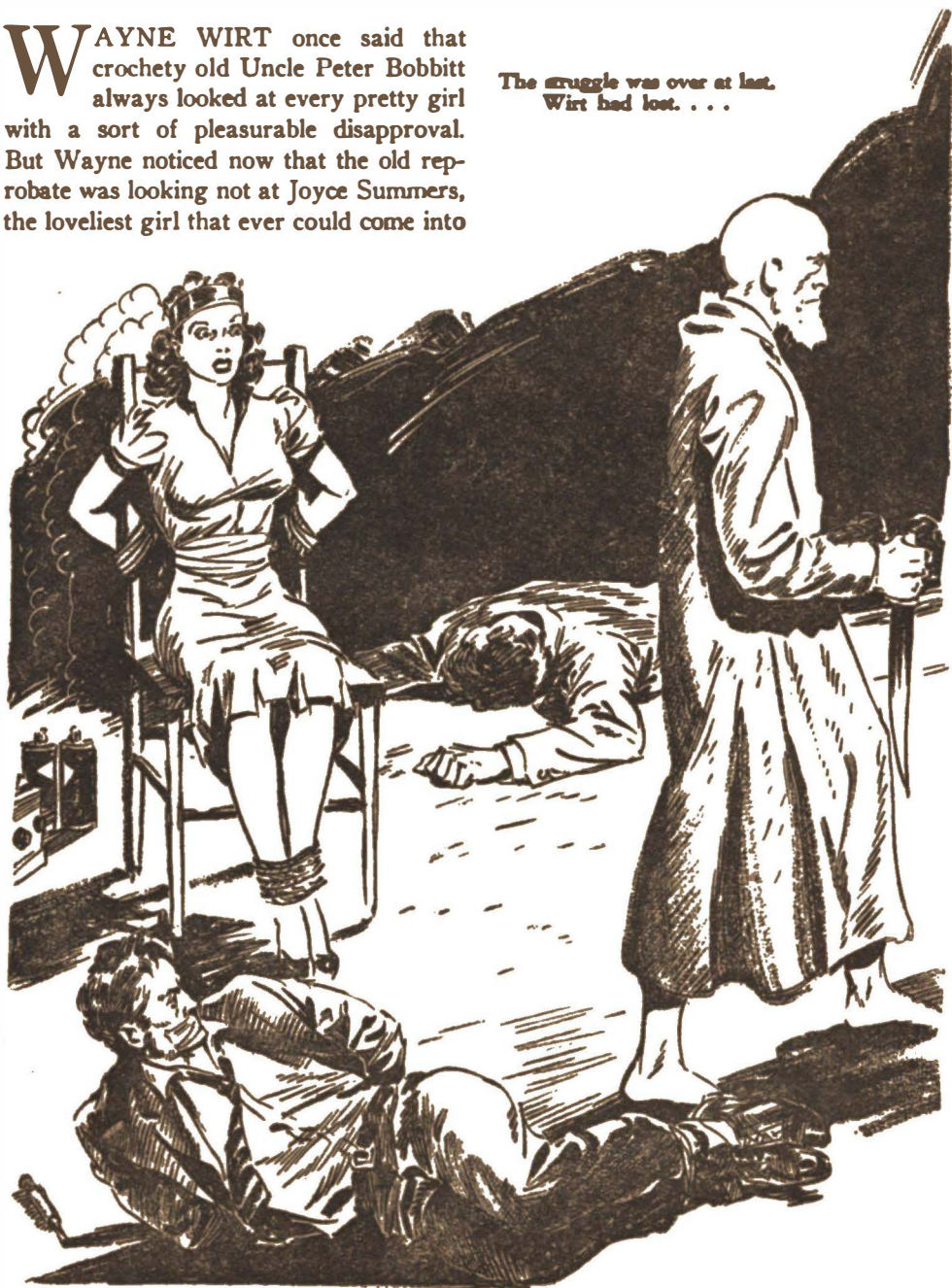
## CHAPTER ONE

### Death Over the Village

**W**AYNE WIRT once said that crochety old Uncle Peter Bobbitt always looked at every pretty girl with a sort of pleasurable disapproval. But Wayne noticed now that the old reprobate was looking not at Joyce Summers, the loveliest girl that ever could come into

his range of vision, but at Wayne himself. The deep-sunken, ninety-two-year-old eyes began with young Wirt's mop of

The struggle was over at last.  
Wirt had lost. . . .



*A Novelette* by DONALD DALE

*It was fantastic and horrible, but Wayne Wirt could no longer doubt the incredible truth after he found May Hobson's senescent, bloodless body—and heard the living, youthful Bettina Starr speak in the silly accents of the dead widow. Age, at long last, had conquered youth!*



bronze hair and slid down the strong, virile body that had for four years stood the gaff of the university gridiron, and for four more the strain of medical school. And in the old eyes there was something

disturbing—a sort of insane excitement.

“Well, you got through college at last,” Uncle Peter’s senile falsetto said inanely.

“Yes,” Wayne answered drily; “I finally got through. You remember Joyce Summers, don’t you, Uncle Peter?”

Of course Uncle Peter knew Joyce, for she, like Wayne, had lived here in Youth Springs all her life. She was now assistant to Miss Sophia Johnson, antiquated principal of the little two-teacher school, wait-

ing until Wayne's internship was served. Then they would be married. Wayne had taken his medical degree yesterday and for two weeks he could have vacation, and Joyce, and home.

And here on the front porch, just out of reach of the June sun, sat Uncle Peter, the right leg of his trousers tucked around a useless stump and his crutches lying beside him. Uncle Peter, who wasn't really an uncle at all, but a comrade who, during a Civil War skirmish, had pulled the wounded Grandpa Wirt out of the mud and into rebel camp. Grandfather Wirt had long rested in Youth Springs Cemetery, but Uncle Peter Bobbitt continued to stick on like a persistent, annoying burr—always to be welcome because of his service, seventy-five years ago. Wayne's homecoming would not have seemed natural without him.

"Yep, course I know Joyce." But Uncle Peter's queer, burning gaze never even flicked toward the girl. "You grewed to be a mighty big, strong feller."

Uncle Peter, the "good deed" that had received—in the manner of the South—nearly three-quarters of a century of repayment, had always been a thorn in Wayne's flesh. As boy and youth, Wayne had always been repulsed by the dirty, selfish old man. But never before had Uncle Peter inspired this uncanny feeling so like fear. Something must have happened to change Uncle Peter, young Wirt thought.

Yes, something had happened to change Uncle Peter. And, though Wayne Wirt could not suspect it, something had happened to change Youth Springs from a charming, peaceful village, where the worn-out rich were learning to seek respite from city strain, into a mad center of weird terror, strange disappearances, and unholy death.

**B**ACK in the cottage kitchen, the boy's mother was putting the last touches on the homecoming supper. "Well, moth-

er," Wayne exclaimed. "I never saw you looking better in my life."

"I'm feeling better, too," his mother answered, as she peeped into the oven at the rising biscuits. "I've wanted to tell you about it, but I am such a poor hand at letters. Youth Springs has a new doctor. Dr. Edouard Voss. He's wonderful. He's a famous specialist in senescent ailments."

"That's fine. They're making a lot of progress along that line now. Maybe I'll try specializing in—say, is Uncle Peter going to Dr. Voss?"

"Not that I know of," Mrs. Wirt answered; "though he may be like a lot of them—sneaking around about it because he doesn't want to admit he's old. Besides, you never know what Uncle Peter'll do."

You never know what Uncle Peter will do. Young Dr. Wirt's mind echoed that after supper when the cantankerous old rebel, who had always gone straight to bed as soon as his stomach was gorged, insisted upon staying up. Not only on staying up, but on going outside. And the porch would not do; his old, cushioned chair must be moved into the middle of the lawn, clear of the house.

The other three sat with him in the hot, murky June night. The moon was not yet up and the stars were pale and ineffectual. Lights shone from cottages set haphazardly in this tiny vale nestling among the hills where rose the splendid cold spring which gave the place its whimsical name, and its pleasant stream.

Footsteps sometimes sounded along the wooden walks and occasionally someone would call greeting to Wayne. Bettina Starr, the village's sole beauty-parlor operator, came in to the yard, bringing with her Orin Nixola, handsome young surrealist artist, new to the village. Joyce had already told Wayne of Bettina's engagement to Nixola. Bettina, baby-faced, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired—but shrewd and



practical. Nixola, small, dark, merry-eyed, who by his charming manner had completely disarmed the villagers of their instinctive distrust for a "feller who painted such crazy pictures." It was a strange match.

The two stayed only a moment, for Bettina complained of a throbbing headache. In a few minutes, Nixola was back. He had taken the girl to her cottage which could be seen across the way on the first easy slope of the hill. She had gone to bed, he said. Amiably, he sprawled on the grass with Wayne and Joyce, as if he had lived in the village a lifetime instead of two short months.

The young people chattered. Mrs. Wirt and Uncle Peter said almost nothing. Then suddenly, the old man shattered the desultory conversation with a shriek. "That's it! It did come! Look!"

He had risen and was standing on his one feeble leg. One hand pointed his crutch in the direction of the rustic bridge across the creek. The other seemed to make a strange gesture above his heart.

The three young people sprang from the grass, their eyes following the crutch pointing through the dimness. A chorus of terrified cries joined the shout of Uncle Peter. Wayne Wirt felt cold prickles of primitive fear run over his body, for he was looking upon something he did not understand. Something beyond the natural, something powerful, and demoniac!

It hung in the sky, just above the trees on the other bank of the creek. A thing beyond description, but with a certain impossible familiarity. A thing with no rime, no reason, come out of nowhere. It did not seem luminescent, yet it was visible in the dark—a gushing, upspringing of liquid, red and viscid—like blood! In the sky, a fountain of blood! And from behind it peeped a face, bearded, as old as time itself! Laughing, leering!

Before thoughts could be summoned, the strange apparition suddenly began to

move! It swept swiftly through the sky, crossed the creek and, like a sentient thing of volition and purpose, swooped and settled on the shingled roof of the cottage where Bettina Starr lay ill.

And then it was gone!

JOYCE spoke up nervously. "That was —was a funny kind of—of fireworks; wasn't it?"

Wayne Wirt knew there were no such fireworks, but he said nothing.

"Must be somebody advertising something." Nixola tried to speak casually, but his voice trembled.

Silly ass! Wirt thought—advertising! But still, he himself had no answer for it. And somebody had to do something to reassure his mother who was white as a ghost in the dim night, and for Uncle Peter from whose throat was bubbling an idiotic chortling that might have been maniacal mirth or insane fear.

"Probably seems a silly idea," Wirt said, "but hadn't someone better go see if Bettina is all right? You go, Nixola, while I see Uncle Peter and my mother into the house."

Perhaps Nixola showed a slight hesitation. Anyway, Mrs. Wirt spoke up: "Son, you go along, too. We'll be quite all right. Go with Orin."

In a few minutes, Wirt and Nixola were knocking on the door of the Starr cottage. After much pounding, Bettina's mother came to the door, in slippers and robe. "What do you want?" she snapped crossly.

"Good evening, Mrs. Starr. Bettina came home not feeling very well. We— we'd like to know how she is now?"

The artist's friendly smile made no impression on the sleepy woman. It took insistence to start her back toward the girl's room. The young men followed, feeling pretty foolish. "Just peep in," Nixola whispered, "and if she's asleep, don't disturb her."

The woman opened the door softly. As the light from the hall fell into the girl's room, Mrs. Starr sprang inside, a cry breaking from her lips. And then she was standing over the bed, wringing her hands, calling out, "Betty! Betty!" to the tumbled emptiness of the bed.

Wirt flipped the button beside the door, and the big ceiling light blazed. "Don't, Mrs. Starr. Don't," Nixola was saying, with a steady arm around the woman; "she's probably just gone back to the kitchen for some water—or something of that sort."

But Wayne Wirt was staring at a crimson splotch on the white pillow-slip. A splotch that seemed to have splashed carelessly—from a fresh wound—carelessly except that it had fallen into definite, unmistakable form. The form of the demonic thing that had appeared in the sky and settled upon Bettina's rooftop. The fountain of blood and the leering satyr's face!

Instinct had been better than logic—that thing had not been fireworks nor advertising, but the sign of inexplicable doom! A lure to draw a girl out into the evil night!

**YOUTH SPRINGS** was a turmoil of strange, mixed emotions, even before the news of Bettina Starr's disappearance spread. For many of the villagers had seen that unnamable manifestation in the sky. To the hearts of most, it had struck fear—fear of the unknown. But upon an incongruous assortment of persons, it had a curious, inexplicable effect.

There was Mrs. May Hobson, the silliest widow whose fortune ever provided a summer cottage at Youth Springs. She had stood on her porch, alone, scarcely breathing, for a full hour before the frightful phenomenon appeared. She forgot her kittenish baby-talk, forgot to toy coquettishly with the brittle, blondined hair. And when the freak spectacle rose and

sailed over to rest upon the Starr roof, a hysterical laugh gurgled from the woman's throat; and tears—tears of joy—ran down her sagging, rouged cheeks. Her cold trembling hand traced a square over her heart.

Banker Martin Hapgood, only fifty-five, but small, withered, watery-eyed, sat in his second floor den and watched that incredible manifestation. Fear of the unearthly clawed at his vitals, but he resolutely kept his thoughts fixed upon a magic promise—a hope. The fear receded, and Hapgood's thin, clammy right hand outlined a cabalistic square over his heart.

Mrs. Cooper Hall, only forty-five, but as faded as most women at sixty, paced her back yard, hating her husband—and waiting. A grim smile played upon her lips as the thing for which she had waited materialized above the trees along the stream. In her mind was the woman who had taken her husband's love—Lucille Lee, tall, willowly actress who spent her summers at Youth Springs. Mrs. Hall's finger moved in mysterious gesture.

Miss Sophia Johnson, the spinster school teacher for the last forty years—now Joyce Summer's principal—looked through the window of the empty, darkened schoolhouse and, watching that startling anomaly in the sky, traced, with fierce jerks, the sinister square.

And there were others. A strange assortment. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### New Bodies for Old

**A**FTER Wirt and Nixola made a quick search about the Starr house and found nothing, they went back to Wayne's home to pick up pistols and then out to spread the alarm. But they found the haphazard streets already full of jabbering, terrorized people. Someone had phoned in to the county seat to notify the

sheriff. Fat Constable Dopper was pushing around in the crowd. In a moment, he climbed upon a stile, and began to organize a search and investigation party.

Before the fat officer could finish his stuttering directions, a middle-aged woman in black dress and white apron, Mrs. May Hobson's housekeeper, came running down the street. Her weeping, distressed words leaped out toward the crowd. "My mistress, Mrs. Hobson! She's gone!"

Nixola did not have time to finish his quiet, kindly suggestion that perhaps Mrs. Hobson had merely been attracted into the streets by the excitement, for the housekeeper was thrusting at him a white sheet of paper, splotted in that strange, frightening manner that he had before seen—blood-splotted with the cabalistic image of a fountain and a leering, old-man's head!

The weird, incomprehensible menace had already snatched two of their small number. The wealthy Mrs. Hobson and


the working girl, Bettina Starr. They had no point in common. How many more would be taken? And who?

In the gray fog of the morning, the searching party returned dejectedly to the village. The night had yielded no clue. If these men had been pursuing a mail-robber, horsethief, or murderer, they would have been unshakable. But to look for something beyond their ken—that confused them.

Still, thought young Dr. Wirt as he dropped moodily behind the others, two women had disappeared. They were real. They—or their bodies—should be found. As for that image, some subconscious thought was begging attention in his mind. If he could get hold of it, perhaps it would be the key. He had known from his first glimpse of the thing that there was something familiar about it. If only—

It was while he was wrestling with that thought, the other searchers trudging ahead, that he was aware of passing the

When  
a girl  
needs  
help



DON'T OFFEND...USE SEN-SEN

BREATH SWEETENER . . . DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION

springs that had given the town its pleasant name. And then young Wirt suddenly knew why the red sky-image had seemed familiar to him. He knew, but the knowledge brought only more confusion of mind.

Why hadn't he made the connection before? It was so obvious. The spring gushing up, and on the flat rock that reared behind it in the side of the hill, the carven image of a triumphant old man!

The Old Man of the Spring, as legend called him, had been there as long as anyone could remember. He laughed because of his power to defeat old age. The first explorers learned his Black Magic, and lived, ever young and virile, until they fell victims to Indian arrows. After that, the secret of hailing him to the aid of mankind seemed lost; but the old man still lurked in these hills, demoniac master of this Fountain of Youth.

Utter drivel, of course; but the sky-image was definitely a replica of the Old Man of the Spring. Nobody had noticed the resemblance because the sky-image had not been very clear; had appeared and disappeared swiftly in a period of excitement.

Wayne quickened his steps, wondering if he should tell of his absurd discovery. But just as he caught up with Constable Dopper, who was ploughing along in the lead, Wirt stumbled over something in the gray fog that lay about their feet—the very thing for which they had searched, hopelessly. A body!

Young Dr. Wirt stooped and peered at the dead thing. Fear and horror and a sense of malignant unreality clutched at him.

May Hobson's expensively cared-for body, clothes torn and muddy. White as wax. On her wrinkled forehead, the bloody splotch—the splash of fountain and the leering, bearded face! In the heart, an opening. Stained by not one drop of blood. Square, trim, careful. Like a door.

A door through which the soul had been removed from this fading, worn-out body! Inexplicable work of the Old Man of the Spring!

But how? Why?

Others of the little coterie of men stooped and examined it more closely. Orin Nixola muttered a smothered oath. No one evinced surprise. The splotch was only fatalistic confirmation of what they in their hearts had expected. Confirmation but not explanation, for the mark brought them no nearer the weirdly perplexing truth.

Wirt wondered dizzily why they did not recognize the image, even though it was blurred. Or perhaps they did and, like him, knew not what to say. What good was recognition doing him? From it he could learn nothing that might save Bettina Starr. Or protect anyone else whom the evil one wished to mark for its own. . . .

**T**HE sheriff came out from the county seat about noon, but he did little for, as he said, the townsmen's search had been thorough. There was nothing left to be done.

Homer Krenshaw, Youth Springs' one lawyer, made the announcement that Mrs. Hobson had only a few days before, requested to be buried as soon after death as possible. All Youth Springs turned out that afternoon for the funeral service in the huge over-ornate living room of Mrs. Hobson's elaborate home. Some probably came hoping vaguely to find the clew of the mystery that still held a town girl entrapped. Curiosity probably brought the majority. Appetite for horror and sensation was evident.

All those things were natural under the circumstances, but Wayne Wirt seemed to sense, here and there in the crowd, an abnormal emotion. He kept telling himself he must be wrong, but there lurked beneath the surface—he knew it!

—an undercurrent of exultant excitement, a sort of obscene joy! Joy at such an occasion—from the *aged!*

This old lady, that old man—who for years had known the kind, silly May Hobson—seemed hardly to conceal, at sight of her gruesomely mutilated corpse, tremors of demoniac joy! Uncle Peter Bobbitt insisted upon taking one last look. Leaning on Wayne's arm, he hobbled over to the coffin and peered down at the pitiful, sagging face that had tried so desperately to fight back the ravages of years. A queer chuckle gurgled in his throat and with his crutch he kept prodding Wayne's strong right leg.

Young Dr. Wirt found himself flinching every time an older woman looked at a young girl. There seemed to be some weird predatory calculation in their glances. My God! Even his mother's eyes looked feverishly upon Joyce!

The meaning of it all escaped him, mad-deningly.

Wirt kept trying to fathom this strange undertow of insanity in the crowd during the short, conventional service. And then the wizened Krenshaw had risen and was speaking. A smirk curled his thin lips. "Mrs. May Hobson only a few days ago made a new will. Having no relatives to call in, she requested that the will be read at her funeral service, for it concerns a citizen of Youth Springs."

A little murmur ran through the gathering. Enjoying his sensational position, Krenshaw gestured for silence. "It is short, and will, therefore, take only a moment for the reading. It is as follows—*I, May Hobson, being of sound mind, do hereby bequeath all my monies and my goods, all properties of whatsoever kind to—*" Lawyer Krenshaw looked around the room, savoring the surprise he had in store—"*to Bettina Starr!*"

Exclamations broke out, cries of surprise. Bettina Starr! All that money to a penniless beauty-operator! Then sud-

denly, the crowd's wits returned— "But Bettina Starr is gone!"

Joyce Summers murmured pityingly in Wayne's ear, "Bettina—isn't it a shame that the poor girl isn't here to receive and enjoy this fortune. Oh, we must hurry and find her so that—"

But Wirt was thinking only that never would the girl enjoy this bequest. She would be found, yes. But dead, marked and mutilated like her benefactress. It was inevitable, since the same weird thing had—

"Hello, peoples!" A gay inane voice from somewhere behind stilled the excited babbling of the roomful of people. "Oh, nicey-nice. A party!"

Homer Krenshaw's little eyes popped to roundness as he stared over the heads of the assembled group and at the speaker. Fear clutched at every heart, for the voice and the inane baby talk were familiar—the unmistakable voice and baby-chatter of the woman who lay dead in the satin-lined coffin before them! The voice of May Hobson!

Heads jerked around, and eyes saw what Krenshaw had seen and everyone knew that his own excited imagination had played a trick on his ears. For the girl who stood in the door greeting them so gayly was the person whom they had so earnestly sought—Bettina Starr! Bettina come back—unharméd!

Bettina's mother screamed out her name joyfully. The whole room became a confusion. Young Dr. Wirt was staring at Banker Martin Hapgood. The man's usually cold, hard features were convulsed with emotion. Tears ran down his thin cheeks. His eyes gleamed and his face quivered with joy. But Wirt felt a shiver run over him, for Hapgood's was not joy for the reappearance of a lost girl. It had in it something inhuman!

The banker's countenance, at sight of Bettina, imaged a hysterical birth of faith—demoniac, satanic faith!

THAT afternoon, young Dr. Wirt had an unsatisfactory session with Uncle Peter. He insisted that the old man tell him the meaning of the strange words he had uttered at the appearance of the weird sky-sign: "That's it! It did come!" As if he had had some foreknowledge of its appearance. But the sly, sunken eyes looked straight at Wayne and the old fellow declared he had said no such thing.

At that impasse, Wirt was seized with the desire to talk with Bettina. There had been some excited threat of arresting her on the charge of killing May Hobson for her money, but everyone knew that the legacy had been a complete surprise to her. Besides, the dead woman could not have been mutilated so strangely by this young, unskilled girl. When the constable had questioned her about her disappearance, she had gushed that she had been on a "lovely, lovely trip" and didn't want to hear any more about it.

About dark, Wirt went to the Starr cottage, but it was unlighted. As Wayne turned away, a boy on a bicycle yelled to say that the Starrs had already moved to the Hobson house. "So soon!" thought Wirt. "She surely didn't waste any time!"

Mrs. Hobson's ghost-pale old house-keeper let Wirt in and, after leaving him in the hall for a few minutes, came back to conduct him silently upstairs to the dead woman's stuffy, overdecorated boudoir. There, back and forth across the thick-piled rug, strutted Bettina Starr.

At his entrance, the girl came toward him, a robe tightly belted around her. The garment, evidently, had been the dead woman's—it was much too large. She never even greeted the young doctor, but looked up at him, a queer triumphant light in her eyes.

"Look at my dreat big, nice, smooove muskels!" she exclaimed, in that ghastly familiar baby-talk of the dead May Hobson!

Wirt fought the repulsion and bewilder-

ment that rose in him and shook the girl firmly by the shoulder. "Bettina! I know you have had a great shock, but pull yourself together. You must try to help--"

His plea for cooperation broke off in a choked cry, for as the girl jerked away from him, her robe slipped from one shoulder, and he saw that which made him fear for his own sanity. Over the heart, the marks of a square incision! Matching the one on May Hobson's dead body! Only here, the "door" was closed, and laced neatly with deft surgeon's stitches!

She retreated from him, defiant. "I've got a young body now. You can't take it away from me. I've waited long—God how long! But now I can live again! The Old Man of the Spring did it."

The Old Man of the Spring! A young body—*now!* That voice! That baby-accent! Those inane mannerisms! That closed door through which the heart, the soul, of the older woman had been transplanted to this new body!

God in Heaven! Wayne Wirt suddenly knew the truth! This was not Bettina Starr—except in body! May Hobson with a young body! Bettina's body!

The old folk-tale *had* come to life. Age *was* master! Age *had* conquered youth! And May Hobson had known it before hand; that was why she had willed her money to Bettina Starr—to *her new self*.

The woman's aging flesh lay in the grave, but her *person* had taken possession of a fresh, youthful body!

## CHAPTER THREE

### Pact With the Devil

YOUNG DR. WIRT walked out of the Hobson house not knowing what to do. Other people would see—perhaps had seen—what he had and, like him, were stunned. Where is the law that can touch such a crime? Would a jury ever put Bettina's body in prison—or in an electric

chair—because the life-greedy old woman that had usurped it had somehow, through black magic—committed worse than murder? God! It was mixed up!

Or perhaps he himself was going insane. Perhaps this was all a nightmare, come from the overstrain of final exams and leaving the university. Perhaps he was even now asleep—in a hideous dream. Surely the whole thing was—

And then he heard a scream—one scream that multiplied into the screams of many and swept the little town like fire in the wind. And Wayne Wirt was seeing again the thing that could not exist—that sign of the devil in the sky! The fountain! The leering face of Age!

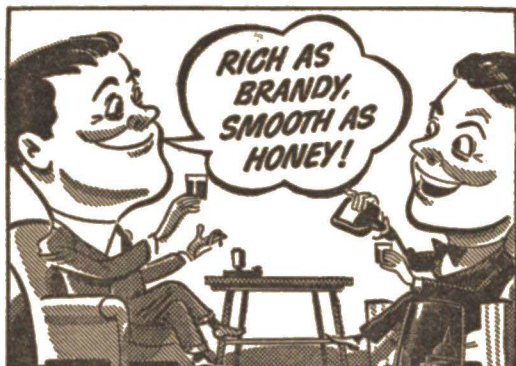
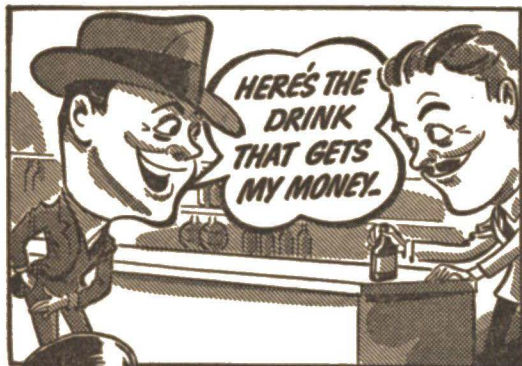
He did not see, this time, from where it had come. He saw it only as it settled upon a secluded cottage that sat on the rise of the hill, and disappeared. The summer cottage of young Slick Merton, the smooth playboy who zoomed in and out of placid Youth Springs in a high-powered

motor for uproarious weekend parties. The daredevil Slick Merton, with his black, taunting eyes and his full, red lips. Had demanding Age chosen his young body as a vessel?

"But look! Look! Over here, too!" A wild voice in the darkness screamed out. Wirt whirled just in time to see the demoniac sign beginning to fade from a roof-top where the houses were built a bit closer together. He couldn't tell what house it was, but as he sprinted down the street, he suddenly realized that it was in the direction of Apperson's—Apperson's where Joyce roomed!

In the moments that followed, the little village of Youth Springs became a maelstrom of emotion, with undercurrents and overtones that could be sensed but not understood. Every young person looked upon every old person with repulsion—and fear. And age seemed to eye youth with a sort of eager excitement—and calculation.

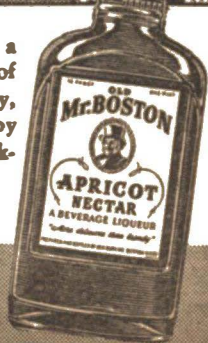
## OLD MR. BOSTON SAYS: "MY APRICOT NECTAR IS A TREAT YOU'LL CHEER!"



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*A Beverage Liqueur prepared by Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.*

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# OLD MR. BOSTON APRICOT NECTAR

ALSO BLACKBERRY • PEACH • WILD CHERRY—70 PROOF

For Slick Merton, upon whose house had fallen the Sign, was gone—snatched, the two terrified chorus girls who were his guests declared, from before their very eyes as he screamed out one shriek of terror. But Wayne Wirt knew only one thing—Joyce Summers was gone!

No, only two things. In his grief, it meant nothing to him that Martin Hapgood, the homely, thin little banker, was gone—simultaneously with Slick Merton. For his fevered mind was roiling with the implications of the disappearance of Sophia Johnson, Joyce's cold, thwarted, sixty-year-old school principal!

After what had happened to Bettina, it was clear. And these new disappearances in pairs. Joyce's lovely body would return as a housing for the barren, hate-filled person of Sophia Johnson! Rather she were dead!

**I**MMEDIATELY, as soon as young Dr. Wirt was calm enough to know that terror had driven his mind to absurdities, he and the artist Nixola tried to call a mass-meeting; but it turned into a mob, shouting useless drivel. Even when the two had called apart some of the calmest and brought them together in the little schoolhouse, everyone seemed afraid to talk. Wayne noticed, with a queer revulsion of feeling that automatically the young people ranged themselves on one side of the room while the older ones shuffled toward the other side. Yes, there across the room, among the enemy, he could see his mother—his own mother!—with Uncle Peter on one side and an immaculately-groomed, gray-vandyked man on the other. Dr. Edouard Voss, someone said.

Wirt said to Nixola, "We've got to do something. But what?"

The young artist replied, solemnly, "Let me try, Wayne." And he rose, took the rostrum and began to speak earnestly. "This is a time for calmness, for logic.

One person has already been killed—murdered and mutilated—in a horrible way. Another has—well, changed—changed in an inexplicable, heart-breaking manner." The young man's voice broke and his voice trembled. He was speaking of his fiancée.

"Four more people have disappeared—disappeared at a strange sign—in pairs, hideously suggestive pairs. But use your common sense. This thing can't be the terrible thing you're thinking. There's something more than meets the eye, and I am going to ask you, beg you, if you know the slightest thing that would throw light upon it, to speak now." His voice rang out emphatically and he turned his eyes to the side where the old people sat, for all volition in this grisly business *must come from age!*

He paused significantly. And in the absolute silence, old eyes shifted uneasily to old neighbors. "To me, a stranger, the old legend about the spring and the crude engraving behind it are absurd—rank superstitions. You have all lived here too long. Your lives have grown too narrow. Can't you see that only ignorance—?"

"Ignorant, air we? Ignorant?" Grandpa Slover was shaking a bony finger at the young whipper-snapper who dared to come in and call them narrow. "Well, you seen the Sign, didn't you? I tell you I know—" Suddenly the old man subsided, and no questioning could drag from him what he had started to say.

So these old people believed in the potency of the god—or devil—of the spring? Wayne, sick with fear, thought of Bettina in Mrs. Hobson's boudoir, her inane baby-talk, her greed for youth. He thought of Hapgood and Merton; of Sophia Johnson and Joyce. He remembered the weird appearance and descent of the demoniac sign—to mark a victim, a *young* body. And to him, young, hardheaded man of science that he was, Nixola's depreciation of its power seemed weak and unconvincing. The meeting broke up with nothing ac-



complished. There was nothing to be done!

There was, naturally, a search—for clues and for those who had disappeared. The constable could not refuse that, but the effort was half-hearted. The searchers knew, though no one voiced the thought, what they were waiting for. And dawn did bring two bodies—mutilated, yes, but again so meticulously mutilated that it could not be called violence. Martin Hapgood, discovered by his butler, stretched on a bench in his own elaborate flower garden, and Sophia Johnson in the teacherage lying on her own bed. Both with heart and blood gone—through a neat square door. A door through which the soul—the *person*—had made its exit to take up its dwelling in a new body!

Wayne Wirt, fresh out of medical school, knew it was stupid. This crazy combination of superstition and surgery. He *knew* what was in the heart and blood, had often examined and analyzed their composition and functions. The terrified villagers were talking nonsense. And yet—

And yet, where did this thing reside? This thing—the soul, the personality—which everyone knows has reality? It had its dwelling somewhere within the being, but science had never located it. Then why not—?

Impatiently, he threw aside such insane thoughts and tried to do something practical. Someway he must save Joyce from the dark, inscrutable fate that awaited her. He plunged about through the hysterical village like a man possessed, asking questions, observing. He found out that Martin Hapgood had made no will, but had, during the past few weeks, turned everything he could lay his hands upon into cash. And the cash was gone. Sophia Johnson had, just three days before, withdrawn from the bank her careful savings of a lifetime—three thousand four hundred forty-two dollars.

One conclusion was inescapable: this

wornout man and woman had taken money with them. They had deliberately planned a new existence!

WHEN the deputy sheriff finally arrived, making excuses for the sheriff's not coming, Wirt tried to tell him about this money motive—for on calmer thought, extortion was about the only sane answer. But he found himself floundering. There was no way it seemed reasonable—unless one was willing to admit the transfer of personality. Discounting that ridiculous theory, he could not make clear why the older people had deliberately and of their own free will arranged their affairs so that they themselves would be killed. That was nonsense.

But perhaps it was a murderous scheme of the young ones. What if they turned up with this money? That was even a more stupid idea. The missing young people had nothing in common; they would not have shared a dangerous scheme with so many. They had no conscious hand in this—Wirt remembered the windowed *body* of Bettina Starr. And besides, there was Joyce. It was unthinkable!

The deputy refused to do anything about the creature that had once been Bettina Starr. Yes, when Slick Merton's and Joyce's bodies—yes, Wayne was thinking *bodies*—should come back (and they would come back), he would insist, if he had to go to the highest justice, that they be incarcerated, kept under surveillance.

And Wirt admitted, for the first time, that he was picturing Joyce, the girl he loved, in some darksome, hellish abode, having her soul emptied from her beautiful young body so that it might hold the spirit, the *person*, of a worn-out spinster, too greedy for vigor and strength to relinquish them when her own youth was gone. Those were the thoughts and resolutions that gnawed at him!

But the afternoon waned, and Merton

and Joyce did not return. Like a drowning man grabbing at a straw, Wirt went over about dusk to talk to Hapgood's wife—or widow. As he mounted the steps of the handsome portico, he met, coming down, Dr. Voss. The doctor raised his hat in the continental manner, saying politely, "If you are calling on Mrs. Hapgood, I fear that she is unable to see anyone. I have just given her a sedative."

Voss passed quickly down the steps, leaving the young man hesitant. Then suddenly, Wirt sprang down after him. "Dr. Voss," he said firmly, "was Mrs. Hobson a patient of yours?"

"Yes, she was, *Dr. Wirt.*" The man's slight emphasis upon Wirt's new title was ironical. "For a few times."

"And Hapgood? And—and Miss Johnson?"

"Yes, those two also, as has been almost every elderly or middle-aged person here. But they did not remain with me. Perhaps they were, as are many, afraid that someone will find out they are my patients—an acknowledgement of being no longer young. Or perhaps my methods were not intriguing enough. Real science, you know, is scarcely ever dramatic." And with these sardonic words, he once more raised his hat and was gone.

A few minutes later, Wirt let himself into his house only to find Uncle Peter peeping through the glass doors into the darkness as if waiting for him in suspense, and his mother huddled in terror in her own room. His conscience smote him that his agony for Joyce had made him neglect these two. Yes, he must go out again. There was a hunch—a silly hunch—that he must follow.

Uncle Peter frantically tried to dissuade him from leaving the house. But when he saw the young man was adamant, he muttered, "Well, come up to my room a minute. I must talk to you." Wayne went. He wanted to talk to Uncle Peter, too. Wanted to tell him to get down that

old rebel musket and take care of things.

"I'm askin' you once more, boy," Uncle Peter said as soon as the door was closed, "not to go out tonight."

It didn't take Wayne long to convince Uncle Peter that he would get nowhere by pleading. "Well, then," the old man said, resignedly, "if you feel that way about it, wait here just a minute; I want to—" And he was making for the hall as fast as his one leg and his crutch could carry him. He must be going for that old musket which hung so proudly in the hall. Well, that was all right—

The door cracked shut. A key grated in the lock. And Wayne knew, even before he jerked at the door that he had been locked in! He shouted at Uncle Peter. He called his mother. There was no answer. The house was as silent as the morgue.

The stubborn old devil, he muttered. Got to have his own way. But down in his heart he knew it was something stronger than a whim; and terror began to grow within him. He threw himself against the door, but the old-fashioned solid oak never budged. He would wear himself out that way. Then to the window. When he found it had been securely bolted—from the outside—he grew panicky. But a chair crashed through the panes and thrust the screen aside. And then he was scrambling precariously along the gutter and dropping to the ground. Senile old dope, Uncle Peter, not to know that he could not keep the boy against his will!

Wirt's foolish panic left him the minute he was in the open and swinging out the back gate, on the hunch he had in mind. "If I don't watch out," young Dr. Wirt was thinking, "I am going to be as jittery as—"

And then he saw it. Yes, the same Sign that three times before he had seen. But never before had he thought of it as a personal menace. A supernatural threat

to him—Wayne Wirt! Yes, this time, it was!

The weird fountain—the Fountain of Youth—and bearded Age triumphant were settling upon his roof! That was why Uncle Peter had wanted him to stay in tonight. So that Thing might work its satanic power upon him!

He remembered Uncle Peter's glances of exultant admiration at his powerful young body. He remembered the old man's crazy, uncontrolled chuckles, his shout of greeting—not surprise—at the first appearance of the Sign. He remembered the touch of the old man's crutch against Wayne's strong right leg. It was all horribly clear now.

Uncle Peter had chosen Wayne's body as a housing for his soul! The old man still hungry for life, planned to move from his worn-out shell into the young man's fine, strong body!

He had a pact with the demoniac Old Man of the Spring!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Satan's Magic Square

**B**EFORE Wirt, desperately following his hunch, had arrived at the neat new white frame building, the front of which served Voss for offices, he was realizing that immediately after he had seen the sign over his own house, he had glimpsed it for a fatal moment as it touched another—the summer cottage of the exotic actress, Lucille Lee. But individuals were no longer important. The little town was under some satanic power. If this force was not curbed, there would be no end to the destruction.

The Voss offices were dark. Perhaps the old doctor was in his living quarters at the back. Wayne circled the house. He'd go in unannounced and make Voss talk. At least, he could slap the sardonic smirk off that face.

And then he saw a shadow moving, out the back gate and through the trees. Wirt followed, as silent as a ghost. The figure headed swiftly for the grove. The young man's assurance rose with the proof that it was human cunning with which he had to cope and not inscrutable demoniac forces.

Then suddenly Wirt realized that Voss was making straight for the spring—Youth Spring with the inscrutable image of Age leering from behind it! God, what was this horror?

The old doctor came out into the small clearing in front of the spring and moonlight made of him an evil wraith. No longer was he a man of science as he knelt before the spring, his silvered hair a weird halo, writhing and twisting and making cabalistic gestures toward the evil genius that ruled over the cursed fountain!

Breathlessly Wirt watched from behind, as the slight gray figure rose after his obeisance and went around behind the spring to the edge carefully on the narrow ledge at the foot of the rock cliff where the leering image of Age Triumphant was engraved. It was like a dream as the scholarly physician tiptoed, stretched his hands high above his head, and pressed them, in ecstatic worship against the stone image. The man was mad! Unbalanced!

And then the thing happened which made young Dr. Wirt's materialistic reasoning crumble. The stone image was responding! Coming to life—moving. It was bowing, the face lowering toward the worshipping devotee!

With a cry, Wirt leaped to his feet and started for Voss. Two beams of light stabbed out, blinding the young man, engulfing him. He felt himself swimming as in a heavy sea of viscid light. A cruel whirlpool of nausea and blackness seized him and dragged him into an undertow of nothingness.

IT WAS a fit abode for the aged demon of the spring upon which Wayne Hope opened his burning eyes, and waked to the agony of his bound and gagged helplessness. A dim, dank stalagmite cave, with the sound of water trickling somewhere near. Through the slowly scattering haze of unconsciousness that hampered his vision, he could begin to see figures—men, women—stirring about.

Doggedly he shook his throbbing head, and the scene became cleared. Then fear and despair fell upon him, deeper than ever. Now the fact was final, irrevocable. For he was looking upon the pitiable victims of this fiendish interchange of souls, borrowing of bodies. And the reality was more gruesome than imagination ever could have conjured.

He could now distinguish four people: Joyce, Slick Merton, Lucille Lee, and—Mrs. Cooper Hall! So, it was Mrs. Hall, whose husband was adoring slave to Lucille Lee, who had chosen the actress's alluring body. What a revenge! For as soon as the wife's body was returned mutilated, dead, Cooper Hall would waste no time marrying Lucille Lee. Yet it would not be his paramour, but his wife! The actress was bound and gagged; Mrs. Hall stood in a cold daze and stared at her.

There was Joyce, and yet the real Joyce was dead. That creature who stood looking down with wild, unnatural joy upon the new body she had acquired was not Joyce Summers, the girl Wayne loved. It was only the beautiful shell of her, housing the bleak soul—the *person*—of Sophia Johnson.

In the meantime, Merton—or that which had been Merton—was examining his fine physique, gloating pride shining from his age-reddened eyes. He jumped around, like an athlete warming up, trying out new-found strength.

Suddenly, he turned a cartwheel. For a second he seemed stunned at his own

prowess; then with an excited cackle, he extended his arms to turn again.

"Hapgood!" A queer brittle voice cracked from somewhere to one side. And Slick Merton quickly, as if in fright, left off his gymnastics and came to rigid attention. Someone had called out "Hapgood!" and Merton—no, the *person* dwelling in Merton's body—had acknowledged the name! That should have been expected.

The speaker was coming into this room of the cave, the sound of his footsteps reverberating against the vaulted walls. Clattering, awkward footsteps. And then the creature was around in Wirt's range of vision. An image familiar from the young man's childhood!

Stiff, gray body and flat, bearded, gray face fixed in that inevitable triumphant leer. Rigid hands. Awkward stride. A stone man! Not two dimensional, as Wirt had been accustomed to see him. Not an engraving in the cliff, but The Old Man of the Spring come to fiendish life!

WIRT had been tearing at his bonds; but with the advent of that unhuman figure, he stared in a paralysis of helplessness. For to what avail does one struggle against superhuman power? The lapse was only for a moment; then man's instinct to fight to preserve himself against all odds reasserted itself. He tugged at the tough hempen cords and wondered where could be Dr. Voss, the human master of this inhuman thing. If Wirt could only talk to Voss!

"Don't be a damned fool, Hapgood. Your incision may not be healed yet." Then, turning to Mrs. Hall, with brittle, inhuman voice the Thing was speaking again. "All right. We are ready." Ready! Ready to siphon her soul from her and infuse it into another body!

In terror, the woman raised feverish eyes to him and asked, thickly and in drugged, drunken accent, "Are you sure?"

Will I be in *that* body? Will I be conscious of being in *that* body?" Her waxen-white hand waved vaguely toward the bound actress.

In a moment, Cooper Hall's middle-aged wife lay upon a stone table while the Old Man of the Spring pressed over her nose an ether cone. When the woman's body was limp, the Stone Man, his back to Wirt, laid out a simple array of surgeon's equipment—hypodermic, blood-pump, rubber hose, knives.

Still facing the other way, he stood so that Wirt was not able to see his next movements. Joyce and Merton shrank against the wall, cowed by what they were seeing. And the black eyes of Lucille Lee were insane with the horror of what was to happen.

When the demon of stone moved aside, a tube was inserted deep into the unconscious woman's heart and blood poured from the small attached rubber hose—poured out carelessly upon the cold ground!

"So that was the reason the "soul-door" wounds of the others had not been bloody? The blood had been removed first. Moving again into Wirt's line of vision, the Old Stone Man bent again to his ghastly work.

And when he moved away, her body was waxen-white putty, bloodless and shrunken. And the now-familiar neat square "door" gaped over her heart.

The cold, inhuman creature had turned to the writhing, terror-wild Lucille Lee when light, quick steps—high-heels on stone—tapped into the tense silence. The fiend raised his head and stared back of, and beyond, Wirt. The young doctor twisted as the heel-clicks came on, until he was looking at the girl who was making them—Bettina Starr!

Not the silly, simpering Bettina he had last seen, but the shrewd beauty-parlor operator!

"Orin!" she was crying out, "you

promised me that there wouldn't be any more—any more killing!"

A voice came surlily through the weird stone mask. It was Orin Nixola's. "We need some more advertising. To get more patients."

"We have enough money now, darling. Please, let's go away together now. You promised! Please!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Devil's Pay-off

YOUNG Doctor Wirt was not surprised at any of these revelations, except the identity of the Old Man of the Spring and his accomplice. Since he had awaked in this hell-hole, he had gradually discovered that Joyce and Merton were under the influence of both drugs and hypnosis—and not possessed of the soul of another person. And, in spite of the fiend's care, Wirt had caught sight of skillful, human hands—he though they were Voss's—in the process of the "operation." Besides, no soul could be siphoned by pouring blood carelessly upon the ground. It was plain murder. Murder for money. At Nixola's suggestion, his victims had turned their wealth into cash so that they could take it with them into their new life. Nixola then murdered them and took the convenient money. Clever scheme.

Wirt had wondered how the perpetrator of all this had caused Bettina Starr to take on so completely the mannerisms and speech of the silly old woman whose place she was supposed to take. But now he knew! It was a piece of deliberate acting, probably many times rehearsed. He should have thought of the possibility of her as a confederate.

Nixola had pushed up the visor of his gray papier-mâché head and was speaking. "How much of Hobson's stuff were you able to get into cash?"

"Almost ten thousand," the girl an-

swered eagerly. "Everything she owned!"

The man frowned. "Is that all? And less than fifty thousand from Hapgood. They can't any of them raise as much cash as you'd expect. Less than five grand from this Hall woman. The old maid school teacher had only three. Old Peter Bobbitt had soaked away every cent of his pension money for more than forty years and he'll be here in a few minutes; but it still is just chicken feed. I want a half million!"

"But, darling," Bettina attempted to throw her arms around Nixola, "this is enough. You said if we only could be together—"

The fellow pushed her impatiently away, took up a bottle from a small case, dosed out some liquid, and poured it down the throat of the helpless Lucille Lee. "If only this stuff will strengthen the hypnosis and keep them *in character* for a few more days, and then drive them insane as it is supposed to do—" Swiftly he slipped the dress from the shoulder of the beautiful actress and cut lightly through the skin around the heart to correspond to the "soul-door" in the body of the poor woman who lay on the operating table. It was all pitifully clear now. The door was only skin deep on the young ones!

Wirt continued to struggle with the bonds, his mind full of two things. Joyce—after a few days, Nixola's drugs would drive her insane. Uncle Peter—he'd soon be here and, hoax of this fiend's promises, would be murdered, murdered for his hoarded pension money. Wayne pushed aside the horrible fact that Uncle Peter had meant to use his body. Poor old duffer!

Nixola had now finished sewing up, with careful surgical stitches the actress' skin, and once more Bettina, wild-eyed with terror and desire to get away, threw herself upon him, trying to win with caresses and tender words. Roughly he shoved her aside and stepped out of his

gray, awkward, papier-mâché disguise suit. Then he went over to where Joyce had sunk, dazedly, into a corner.

He poked at her with his toe. "She's a good subject. Believe I'll put that electric band around her head. It'll either drive her completely nuts, or else will make a very convincing Sophia Johnson of her. If the first, I'll have to get rid of her; if the other, she'll be swell advertising."

With a cry of protest, Bettina Starr lunged at the man. "No, no! You promised me. Joyce was my friend!"

"Softy!" the man spit at her and, without looking around, thrust her away. And then, Wayne Wirt's heart leaped with hope, for Bettina was running toward the exit of the cave. Her better nature had asserted itself; she would bring down the wrath of the village upon Nixola.

But somehow he had sensed her purpose and action. In one leap he caught her. He forced down her throat a dose of the liquid he had given the Lee woman, bound the girl, and threw her on the floor. "You can stay here and *be* May Hobson for me," he laughed hysterically, "if you don't have any more guts than that." Then he picked up a metallic headband, attached to electric batteries, and walked toward Joyce!

**R**AGE and despair filled Wirt as he lunged wildly against the bonds that held his murderous fingers from that fiend's throat. It was a scene that might well have inspired the artist's surrealist brush—if Nixola had been thinking of scenes.

The murdered woman, with the fantastic square "door" in her body, whom the greedy fiend would use for advertising." The dashing Slick Merton sunk against the wall in a limp half-stupor. The lovely Lucille Lee and the pert little blonde, Bettina Starr, seemingly unconscious now. And in Wayne's threshing about he had discovered one more surprise: old

Dr. Voss, bound and as helpless as the young doctor.

And in the midst of all this horror, Orin Nixola, himself crazed by a surfeit of violence, bound that metal artificial-fever band around Joyce's head.

Wirt's impotent rage must have sounded out in spite of his gag, for suddenly Nixola turned around and fixed his gaze upon the helpless young doctor. Then the artist snatched up a hypodermic needle, filled it from a tiny phial, and came over to Wayne.

Roughly he pushed up the young doctor's sleeve, and cocked the plunger of the needle. Now all hope was gone. Wayne would be helplessly drugged, just as he had discovered that his bonds were loosening and he could try to do something, no matter how desperate.

Nixola pinched up the flesh of Wirt's arm and thrust the needle—

The distant tapping of a crutch on stones stopped that needle in midair. Nixola raced across the room, dragged on that gray, stone-like suit and mask and turned to greet the old man who was now entering the cave. "You are ready, Mr. Bobbitt?" Nixola's tones behind the mask were sepulchral.

Poor old Uncle Peter! How tottery and feeble he seemed. Ninety-two years is a long life. And how touchingly comical in that long, old-fashioned linen duster. In a few minutes, he, too, would be dead—murdered. A victim of his own unnatural desire to cheat life.

Uncle Peter's sharp old eyes flashed around the room. "Yep. I'm ready. Ready for you to turn that boy loose."

"What!" Nixola's exclamation almost threw him out of character.

"Yep," Uncle Peter's high-pitched old voice cracked. "I got all het up and meant to git me a new body, but now I changed my mind. I don't understand yore power. But you ain't got much on me; I'm bound to be purty nigh as old as you are and

purty damn' near as smart. So I got to thinkin'. And I decided this grandson of my old side-kick has got a right to live. Better right'n I have. I've lived long enough."

Nixola in his anger threw up the visor of his mask and started for the feeble old man. But Uncle Peter's old musket was appearing miraculously from beneath the floppy "duster." Nixola launched himself at the tottering Uncle Peter and they went down in a heap, the young man's hand flashing out of his belt with a gleaming knife aimed at the pitiful old fellow whom one blow had knocked to unconsciousness. But he had made a valiant try!

With Wirt's fierce, automatic lunge to help the old man, his wrist bonds finally gave way. He threw himself upon Nixola. Wirt was larger than Nixola, but the artist was a steel-wire spring—coiled by desperation. And the young doctor's legs were still tied. Nixola still had that knife.

For a few moments, they were two snarling, growling beasts in a wordless struggle to death. And then the inevitable time came when the wiry desperate fiend was above the young man with helplessly bound legs and the knife was descending, straight to Wirt's heart. The struggle was over at last. Wirt had lost.

And then the room thundered with a musket discharge. A hole appeared in Nixola's forehead, widened, darkened with gushing blood. A look of pained surprise twisted his handsome face, as his body doubled and slumped upon Wayne Wirt.

In a moment, young Dr. Wirt was kneeling over the white, shrunken old man on the stone floor. "Oh Uncle Peter!" And there were tears in the young man's voice.

"Don't you bother about me, son," the old man whispered feebly. "I'm a onery old cuss. Like I told the Old Man of the Spring, I've lived long enough." His eyes closed wearily.

"SALAAMING? Me, salaaming?" Dr. Voss chuckled. "No, I wasn't making obeisances in front of the Old Man of the Spring, but it was at this point that I lost Nixola whom I had suspected and was following; and I thought I had caught a flash of a crack of light in the rock wall. I was simply stooping to get a different angle. And of course, when I stretched my arms up against the image, I was looking for the secret entrance. I found it. The stone image *bowed*, and let me in. You should have realized that."

"A fellow doesn't ask information from a suspected villain, especially if the suspect is in cahoots with a supernatural power. It was pretty clever of Nixola to watch your office, and choose his victims from your most gullible patients."

"Yes, he was clever enough about some things. Of course, the image painted with phosphorous on a red balloon, and slid along a cable of light wire, was not very good. You yourself never recognized it until you happened to see the graven Image of the Old Man of the Spring. And probably no one else made the connection except those poor old creatures who had been told to watch for it."

Wayne, Joyce, Mrs. Wirt, and the old doctor sat in the pleasant Wirt living room. Voss went on seriously, "I am glad that my antidotes and treatments have entirely restored Joyce and the others. Though it might have been just as well

if poor, deluded Bettina hadn't lived to face trial as an accomplice of Nixola."

"Where did he ever get the idea of such a crazy, impossible scheme?"

"My dear boy, it was an almost fool-proof scheme. The quest for a fountain of youth is the most deeply rooted and most frantic of man's urges. Ever since that archquack, Alexander of Abonutichus, and his scheming partner Cocomas practiced their first-century knavery on the Romans, rascals have profited by the senseless hope of the aging. Think of Ponce de Leon. Think of the pills, rejuvenators, and stuff that flood the markets today. There are 28,000,000 people in the United States alone today who are facing old age."

Wirt reached for Joyce's hand, sighing for Voss's long-windedness.

"They should realize," the old gentleman went on, "that every period of life has its compensations. I myself prefer this *mature* age."

Wayne's mother blushed. She and the doctor had just revealed that they were soon to be married. The handsome old doctor glanced at the pretty, gray-haired woman. "I think your mother and I know more about love and can make more of it than young people are ever capable of doing."

Joyce and Wayne smiled into each other's eyes. They were glad the older people thought so. They didn't.

THE END



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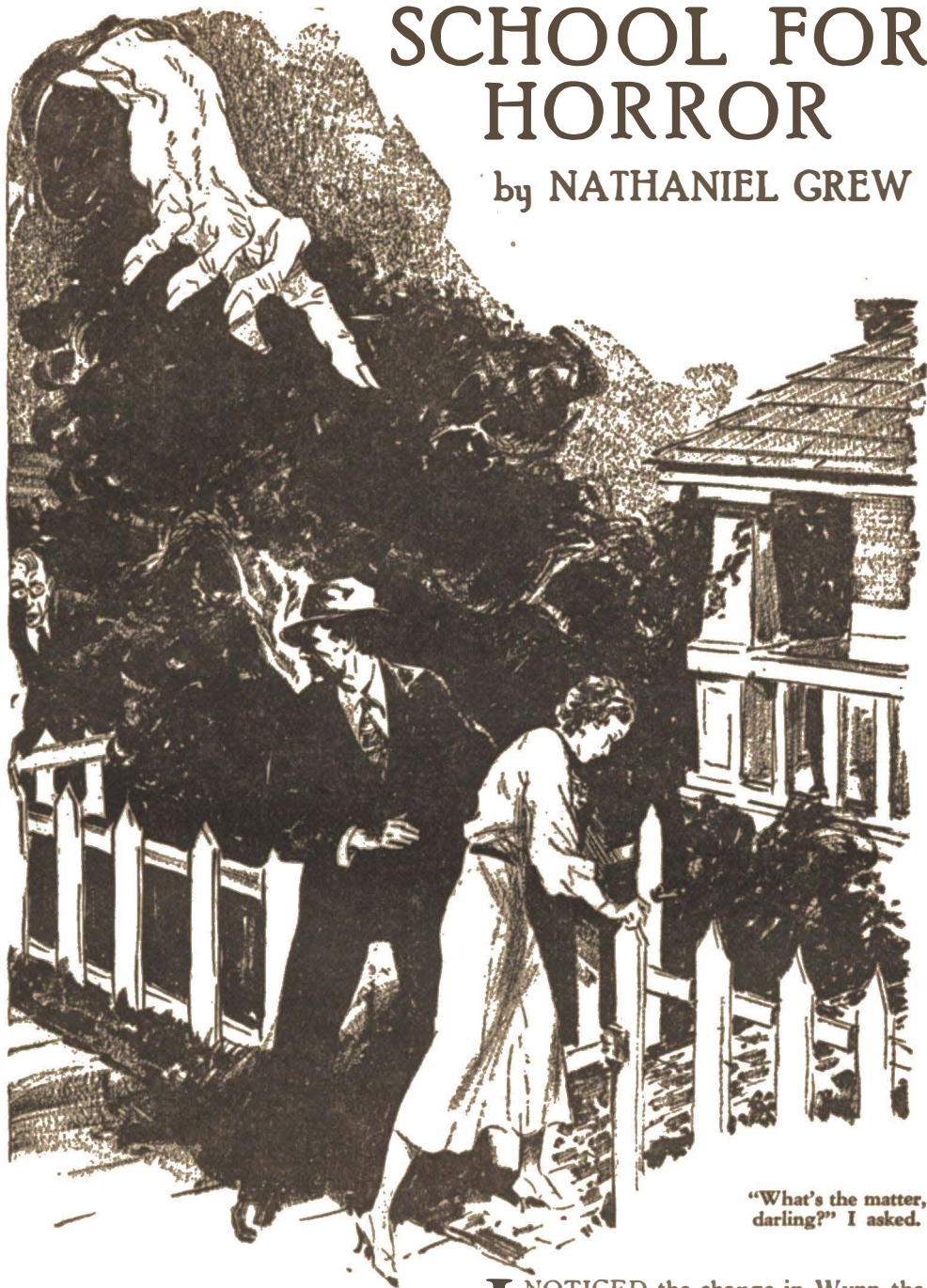


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# SCHOOL FOR HORROR

by NATHANIEL GREW



"What's the matter, darling?" I asked.

*How could my poor wife be made to feel the agony of body and mind that her sister suffered—two hundred miles away?*

**I** NOTICED the change in Wynn the moment I met her at the train. She was nervous; her usually smiling mouth was a tight, straight line, and in the depths of her dark eyes there was something remote. Always, her gaze had met mine frankly—mirroring the absolute

honesty of her nature—but in that first glance I realized that some fog of evasion had floated between us.

I picked up the single suitcase she had carried, took her arm and led her out to the car. "What's the matter, darling?" I asked. "Is Nina all right?"

She halted abruptly, in the middle of the station. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because — b e c a u s e y o u s e e m — strange—"

"Strange?" she echoed. She laughed shortly—not as if she were amused. "Nothing's strange. I feel all right. Nina's fine, and sends her love to you—and that's all."

"Good!" I said. "Perhaps I just imagined it."

Nina was Wynn's younger sister, then in her last year at the very exclusive Lenfield Finishing School for Girls. Wynn had gone to visit Nina for a few days at the school which was located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was the first time since our wedding that we had been separated for longer than a few hours.

After we got home, the change in Wynn became more and more apparent to me, and although she denied it with increasing irritation it could not have been plainer if the fact of her worry had been stamped in letters on her forehead. And, watching her covertly, it seemed to me that there was something hidden in her eyes that went a lot deeper than mere worry. There was terror in her eyes—stark, unreasoning fear of something she refused to admit even to me, her husband.

For several days I tried to tear aside the curtain of doubt between us—to reach out to her through the pall of silent, waiting fear that seemed to envelope her. Time and again I tried to question her about what might have happened during the time she visited her sister, but her answers were always evasive. Then, one morning at breakfast, Wynn suddenly said, "Jim, I want five hundred dollars."

"Don't we all?" I said, before I saw the intensity of her expression. Then, I asked, "Why?"

"I can't tell you. But I must have it! I mean it, Jim—I must have it today!"

"Of course—if you'll just tell me what you want it for—"

"I can't! I—I don't know, myself. I may not need it—but I want it in case I do need it—"

I smiled at her as if she were a child. "When you need it—and when you want to tell me what it's for—I'll be glad to give it to you." And without waiting for her answer, I left her at the table and went to the office. In this way I hoped to force her into the open. If she needed five hundred dollars badly enough to take me into her confidence, she could have it. Otherwise, I told myself, she could do without it.

WHEN I got home that night I was surprised to discover Wynn in an entirely new mood. Instead of the melancholy of the last few days, the impression she gave was of almost feverish gaiety. She was wearing a black velvet gown, which to my taste, was the most becoming thing in her wardrobe—with its full skirt, tight waist and low-cut neck, it made a startling contrast with the smooth, white expanse of her throat and shoulders. Not all women can wear black velvet to advantage, but Wynn was one who could—and as she came to me with her arms outstretched in eager greeting, I felt the undiminishing thrill that the sight of her always sent tingling along my spine. Yet there was something wrong—something missing—not only in her kiss, but in her costume. I had a sudden amazing impression that this lovely woman was not my wife, but someone totally strange to me, and even as I crushed her to me and pressed my lips to hers, the feeling of uncertainty persisted.

Looking back, I can understand why

such doubts should have mounted in my brain. A woman who is in terror of her life—in desperate fear not only for her own life but for the lives of those she loves—is naturally not her ordinary self. But if I had been able to guess one-hundredth part of the ungodly truth—how much easier it would have been to bear the apparently insane incidents of that evening!

I held her out at arms' length—admiring, yet questioning. "Something's wrong," I said. What is it? Or perhaps it's just that you *look* a little different. Is it because you're not wearing the necklace you always wear with this dress?"

She put her hands to her throat in a quick gesture of dismay. Then she laughed and said, "Isn't that stupid of me? I must have forgotten it."

The necklace to which I referred had been an engagement present—but to me, its sentimental value was even stronger because it had belonged to my mother. It was a rather ornate, heavy gold chain with a pendant of rose-cut diamonds, and until this evening Wynn had always worn it on every suitable occasion. I asked, "Don't you want to go and put it on?"

She ignored my question and made some trivial comment on the subject of the dinner she had ordered, and from this she launched herself into an almost hysterical, scatter-brained monologue that was so unlike her usual reserve and dignity that I could only sit back and stare at her. I noticed that despite her strange animation, she kept her hands folded in her lap, and it may have been their passivity that attracted my gaze.

"Why, Wynn!" I exclaimed. "You're not wearing either your engagement ring or your wedding ring!"

At first, I was more hurt than curious. Long before, she had told me that those two rings would never be removed from her finger in her lifetime.

Her frightened eyes looked into mine

for an instant, and then glanced away. "They—they were getting too small for me," she stammered. "I—I took them to—to somebody—to be made larger—"

"Nonsense! You haven't gained an ounce since I've known you." Suddenly the realization came to me that she was lying. In a cold, stern voice I asked, "Where did you take them—and my mother's necklace? What did you do with them? Answer me!"

I saw that her lips were trembling and her eyes were beginning to fill with tears—but for the first time in our married life I was unmoved by the sight of her misery. In symbol, if not in fact, she had destroyed our love and our happiness. I must confess that I lost my temper and said things in the heat of anger that I wish I could forget.

When at last she confessed that she had sold her rings and necklace, but still refused to tell me her reason for doing so, my rage grew so violent that I slapped her hard across the face and shouted, "Have you gone mad, you mercenary little fool?"

**S**UDDENLY she was groveling at my feet—sobbing, begging me to forgive her. "You're right," she moaned. "I *am* going mad—because—because I can't stand it! I could stand it if it were just—just *me*—but—"

I raised her to her feet and grasped her by the shoulders. "What are you talking about? What can't you stand? What has happened to you?"

"I can't tell you—"

"You must!"

I willed her to tell me with every atom of strength that was in me. Her tragic, tear-stained eyes tried to avoid my searching gaze. But gradually, I saw the weakening of her resolution—the uncompromising line of her jaw softened—her lips trembled and parted: "You won't believe it, Jim—it's too *insane* to believe!—and

too terrible. But I'll try. It's about—"

The end of the sentence was a sudden scream of pain! For no visible reason, Wynn clutched her hands to her breast and fell writhing to the floor. I picked her up and laid her tenderly on the bed, pleading with her to tell me what was wrong. But her agony was so unendurable that it was several minutes before she was able to utter an intelligible word. Finally, however, I was able to distinguish: "They're crushing her! They're crushing her! Oh, they can't do that to her!"

"She's gone crazy!" I thought, and my first reaction was to grab her in my arms and hold her quiet for fear that she might do herself some serious harm. The pain seemed to be concentrated in her bosom, and I had to hold her hands to keep her from tearing her flesh. Once, I thought I heard her scream something that sounded like, "You'll get the money!" But by now I was miserably certain that there was no sane reason in anything she said.

For awhile she struggled violently against me—and then, just as instantaneously as the fit had come, it ended! Wynn's body relaxed, and with a deep, exhausted sigh, she lay back and closed her eyes.

I knelt by her side and said, "Wynn—Wynn darling—for God's sake tell me what's the matter. Shall I get a doctor?"

Wearily she moved her head from side to side. "No—not a doctor. No doctor could do me any good—"

"Why? What is it, Wynn? Tell me."

She shook her head again. "I tried, Jim. But—but they won't let me."

"Who won't let you?" I asked the question although it seemed perfectly obvious that her mind was so deranged that to question her was useless.

She made no attempt to answer me—probably she scarcely heard. The whole of her consciousness seemed to be con-

centrated on some horrific mystery that was apart from me. As if I were trying to reason with a child, I asked, "When you had that—attack—why did you say, 'They can't do that to her?' What did you mean by that, darling?"

Again, only the movement of her head upon the pillow indicated that she had heard. In the end, I decided to let her rest undisturbed until the morning when I would have her examined by specialists. So, with an aching heart, I went to bed—to lie wondering and worrying until sleep came.

Once, in the middle of the night, Wynn moaned something that sounded like: "Nina! Nina, my poor dear! . . ." Perhaps she was dreaming about her sister, or had in some way confused her own afflictions with the identity of her beloved Nina.

ABOUT three o'clock in the morning I dozed off—to dream vague but terrifying visions in which my wife was cruelly tortured and I was powerless to help her. Not more than half an hour later, I awoke to find that Wynn had vanished!

My fears may be imagined. Had she jumped from the window to her death? Had she lost her mind completely and was she now wandering the streets aimlessly—easy prey for any prowler of the night? These and a thousand other ghastly conjectures hammered in my brain as I threw myself into my clothes. I wondered if she had left the apartment in her nightgown, and in a way, I hoped that she had, for then she would surely be picked up on sight.

In the few seconds it took me to dress, I was able to bring some organization to my chaotic state of mind. First, I called the police and told them as many details as seemed necessary. Then I proceeded to telephone every friend and acquaintance we had—in the frail hope that Wynn

would communicate with one of them. And finally I spoke to Dr. Enniston and described to him exactly what had occurred. Quite naturally, he refused to express any definite opinion without having seen Wynn, but he made the guarded statement that it sounded as if she were suffering from a not uncommon mental aberration.

"But," I demanded, "from your experience with such cases—what is she likely to do? Where should I look for her?"

"I'm sorry—it is impossible to make any kind of guess. But I ought to warn you that when she is found—she may not be alive."

"You mean she will kill herself?"

"You must be prepared for it."

With that tragic conversation still ringing in my ears, I started out of the apartment—to walk the streets—to search the face of every passer-by. But as I reached the door, the thought struck me that I ought to be armed, and I returned to the bedroom to look in the top bureau drawer where I kept my .32 revolver. The contents of the drawer were scattered, as if it had been hurriedly searched—and the gun was not there. Obviously, Wynn had taken it. That could mean only one thing—and that thing hit me in the pit of the stomach like a physical blow. At this moment there might be a small blue hole in Wynn's temple from which blood seeped slowly—lifelessly . . .

The remainder of that night . . . and the next day . . . and the next—it was time that did not exist as a reality. It was endless eternity of doubt, of hope that ebbed and flowed like the sluggish tide of a dead sea. When, after three days, nothing had been heard of Wynn, the police came to the belief that she had killed herself and that it was only a matter of a short while until her body would be found—perhaps at the bottom of the river.

At moments I almost wished that their theory was true—so many other more ghastly possibilities occurred to me.

On the morning of the fourth day I telephoned Nina at the Lenfield School. Wynn had loved her even more, I sometimes thought, than she loved me, and I hated to think what the terrible news must have meant to the poor girl. The telephone connection was bad—so bad, in fact, that most of the words that came over the wire were lost in a jumble of mechanical sounds. Out of it all, the one thing I was able to distinguish was: "Please come, Jim, I need you—"

"I'll take the night train," I told her, "and be there in the morning."

What better thing could I do? In the city I was slowly going mad with the eternal waiting, waiting for nothing more hopeful than the end of hope. Perhaps with Nina, the one person in the world whom Wynn had loved as she loved me,



it would be possible to achieve some degree of saneness about our loss. It seemed so logical—so right—for us to seek each other's comfort that I wondered why Nina had not tried to get in touch with me—instead of waiting for me to call her. If I had been clever enough to guess the answer to that, how much agony of mind and body might have been prevented!

**A**T ABOUT ten o'clock the next day I arrived at Crestline which is nothing more than a flagstop, and I was surprised when three well dressed women joined me on the deserted platform. A station wagon from the Lenfield School drove up and we all got in.

I found myself sitting next to a rather beautiful matron in her middle thirties. Smiling, she said, "You are too young to be the father of one of the girls. Are you one of the professors?"

I told her that I was merely the brother-in-law of one of the students—and naturally enough, the conversation continued. Mrs. Land was the mother of one of the girls, and she, like the other two women who were riding with us had come down on the same train to see their daughters.

I asked: "Is it merely a coincidence that we all decided to pay a visit at the same time?"

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Land. "It's for some special occasion. From my daughter's letter I couldn't quite understand what it was—but it sounded important to her for me to be here. So I came."

One of the other women laughed. "My daughter's letter must have been very much like yours. I suppose we'll find out what it's all about when we get there."

In about an hour we arrived at the Lenfield School—a group of six large buildings which were hidden within an elaborate park on the flat top of a mountain. The situation was undeniably gorgeous, but also it seemed to me that it was too isolated from the rest of the world.

The nearest human habitation was at least five miles away.

The station wagon came to a halt at the steps of what appeared to be the main building, and as the driver got out to open the door, one of the strangest and most disturbing women I have ever seen came down the steps to greet us. It was impossible to analyze exactly what it was about her that was so compelling—she was beautiful in a very pale, exotic fashion, though there was no real delicacy in her face. On the contrary, her features were almost negroid and if it had not been for the waxy whiteness of her skin, a first glance would have proclaimed her race. Her eyes were her most arresting feature—meeting her coolly appraising gaze for the first time, I had the conscious feeling that the art of hypnotism would not be difficult for her to master.

"I am Miss Lenfield," she said, extending her hand to one of the ladies. "Welcome to Lenfield School!"

Mrs. Land said, "Miss Lenfield? Surely not the daughter of—"

"Yes—my mother was the founder of the school. Of course you must have met her. Surely you have heard that she died only a short while ago? . . . No? How surprising! I am the head of the school, now—"

Miss Lenfield went on talking as she led us into the building. The room we entered was like the living room of a country estate—it was cheerful, comfortable, decorated with considerable taste—and yet, from the moment the door closed behind us I felt ill-at-ease. It was too quiet, too remote, and although this was a school where one would expect to hear gay shouts and laughter, the only audible sounds were those we made ourselves.

Within two or three minutes of the time we sat down, a Negro servant appeared with a silver coffee tray from which Miss Lenfield served us each a cup, saying, "I was sure you would want it after

that awful trip in the station wagon.”

I remember taking the first couple of sips of coffee, but I do not remember finishing the cup. The next ten hours or so are a complete blank in my mind—and then, when I returned to consciousness, it was the semi-consciousness of delirium. Much of what happened I can remember vividly—too vividly; other things seem vague—distorted scenes in a dope induced dream. I know this—that until the very last, although my brain was able to register what passed before me, I had no will of my own. I felt neither hate, nor anger—nor even curiosity.

WHEN I awoke (if it can be called waking) I was lying on a couch in a dark room. I opened my eyes and saw that Miss Lenfield was sitting by my side, smiling down at me. As from a great distance I heard her voice:

“Feeling better now? Can you understand me?”

I nodded.

Then, in a softly modulated, almost monotonous voice she began to explain. It would be impossible for me to attempt to repeat the actual words she used. While my brain was able to form impressions of what she told me—the words—the individual sentences—were nothing more than a series of meaningless sounds. However, the story must have been something as follows:

“My name,” she told me, “is Tonda—I have no last name. While my mother was still a girl—long before she became Mrs. Lenfield and established this school—she was sent by her parents to visit a relative on the island of Haiti. While she was there, she got herself involved with an octoroon—and my birth was the result. My mother abandoned me in the hills—to die. But I was discovered, and raised, by a *papaloi*—a witch-doctor, you would call him. It was from him that I learned the secrets of voodoo, of the creation of

zombies, of the drug that is mingled with your blood at this moment . . .”

I heard myself asking the question: “Why do you tell me this?”

“Because it amuses me to be cruel to you—and to your women—and to all the other women and their daughters who lead sheltered lives.” Only for an instant, that smile vanished from her lips. “They shall pay for the pain and poverty that I suffered! They shall pay a million times over!”

Now she told me to rise and follow her, and like an obedient automaton, I obeyed. But the first few steps I took were very unsteady, and as I passed a wall mirror, I fell against it, smashing the glass and cutting my left wrist rather deeply. Although I felt the pain of the wound, it seemed to make so little difference to me that I merely stuck my hand in my pocket without looking at it. Tonda could not have been aware that I had injured myself. Taking my arm, she said, “You will soon regain your strength—but not your will power until the drug wears off—another twelve hours or so. But by that time you will be dead—”

As we left the administration building and walked across the narrow stretch of lawn that separated it from the next building, Tonda said, “Over there to the left is the girls’ dormitory. As you know, we only have twenty-five students in the school—but they all come from wealthy families, so twenty-five is really more than enough.” (More than enough for *what?* I wondered.) “But here we are at the little theatre. . . .”

We entered a small playhouse that was designed to hold about fifty persons, but only the three mothers whom I had met were present. Even in my dull, unobservant condition, I understood that the women were doped. They sat in a row, looking neither to the right nor left, and seemed not even to be aware of my presence when I sat down next to Mrs. Land.

Tonda sat next to me, leaned back comfortably, and said, "Before I have the curtain rise on our interesting little tableau, I want to explain to you ladies what has already happened to you—and what is going to happen to you. Have you ever heard of a voodoo ceremony in which the soul of a girl enters the body of a goat? I'm sure you have. Probably you laughed at the idea, and thought such things were impossible. But you were mistaken, I assure you. In fact, during the time you were unconscious—as the result of drinking my coffee—I completed the *transference of your own daughters' souls into your bodies!* I need not tell you how this is done—it is enough that it is done. But I don't expect you to believe me without proof—and that is why we are holding this small demonstration . . . Look at the stage!"

**T**ONDA clapped her hands and the curtains slowly parted. Revealed in glaring lights were three young girls, tied hand and foot to a crudely built scaffolding. All three of the girls were about eighteen years of age, and I suppose it would be more correct to refer to them as young women. But in the youthful simplicity of their school dresses, they seemed the very picture of tender innocence. All three were beautiful, and all three trembling with terror. They had not been drugged, as their pleading voices testified.

In a moment, a gigantic Negro entered the stage from the wings. Turning toward us, and shading his eyes from the lights, he asked, "Which one?"

Tonda called, "Any one—start with Miss Land."

Moving with slow, passionless deliberation, the Negro encircled with his huge hands the delicate white throat of the loveliest of the girls . . . two great thumbs pressed deep.

Suddenly, at my side, Mrs. Land's head

jerked back and from her open mouth issued the choked, gasping cry of strangulation! Her hands clawed at her neck, vainly attempting to loosen something that was not there; her bulging eyes rolled horribly; her struggle for breath grew more desperate. I heard Tonda call, "Not too much!"

The Negro removed his hands from the girl's throat—and simultaneously, both Mrs. Land and her daughter drew into their tortured lungs the oxygen of life. Panting—close to fainting—the older woman slumped weakly to the floor; while on the stage, her daughter was held upright by the ropes at her wrists.

"That was a very mild demonstration of the agony I can make you suffer if I choose to do so. Tomorrow I shall send you back to your homes—and from the day you arrive, you must begin to send me certain definite sums of money which I shall demand. If, for any reason whatever, I do not receive this money, both you and your daughters will be tortured to the limits of human endurance. No escape is possible—though you fled to the end of the earth, you would still experience every sensation that your daughters feel. *Do you understand that?"*

Dumbly, the three women nodded their heads.

For some minutes I had been hearing the drip—drip—drip of a liquid, somewhere near me, and I believe that it was about this time that I realized it was my own blood, seeping through my pocket and splashing on the floor. It was also about this time that I began to be aware of a curious feeling in my head—as if I had been drowning at the bottom of the sea, but that now I was struggling up through countless fathoms of black water into the blessed light and air.

My attention was so concentrated upon my own slowly changing state, that I was scarcely conscious of what Tonda was saying. I caught disconnected phrases:



“ . . . she returned, intending to shoot me and to release her sister, Nina Vance. In case one of you should be lured by the same impossible ambition, I intend to show you what will result . . . ” She clapped her hands, and again the curtains parted.

**N**INA and Wynn faced each other from opposite sides of the stage—Wynn manacled to a wooden post, with her arms extended above her head—while her sister was attached by polished metal bands to an elaborate framework from which four heavily insulated wires snaked into the wings.

Gradually, the theatre began to fill with a sound like the buzzing of a tremendous swarm of bees—and I realized that somewhere nearby, an electric generator was picking up speed—and piling up current. After a few moments, the stage lights dimmed to a faint glow, and then the Negro entered, carrying with him an instrument that looked like a small, metallic disc on the end of a three-foot pole. From the lower end of the pole, a wire led into the wings from which he had come.

Tonda was saying, “I don’t know how much any of you understand about electricity—but at least you can believe that it is not a pleasant sensation to be struck by lightning. . . .”

The Negro approached to within about five feet of Nina and extended the disc-tipped pole toward her chest. Suddenly a blue-white spark crackled between her body and the metal—and both Nina and Wynn screamed in a single voice of mortal suffering!

Tonda murmured, “In a way, it’s a pity you are too drugged to really appreciate what is happening. Can’t you understand that your sister-in-law is being burned to death and that your wife will feel all the pain of her sister’s death?”

Loathing—the will to murder, to de-

stroy—primitive, blind rage was welling inside me, pulsing in my brain, swelling the muscles of my arms and chest. “Yes.” I said. “I understand that.”

She laughed at me. “Not with that drug in your blood. You may think you do, but—”

She must have read the intention in my eyes. With a startled, incredulous squeak of terror, she started to slip out of her seat. I threw myself on her and forced her backwards, so that the iron arm of the theatre chair caught her at the middle of the spine. As I reached to get the fingers of my one good hand around her throat, there was a loud “crack!” and Tonda’s body doubled backwards to hang grotesquely over the chair arm.

At last I looked back to the stage, expecting to see the huge Negro charging at me. Instead, what I saw the big, black fellow looking from Wynn, to Nina, and back to the electrode in his hand—horrificed amazement written large on his stupid features. He stared at me and asked, “For God’s sake, Mister—what I doin’ here? ‘What I been doin’?”

I knew then that he had been hypnotized—and that there was nothing more to fear. “Cut down those girls!” I yelled. “And—and—” And then I fell forward on my face—fainting from loss of blood.

There is not much left to tell that *can* be told. Transfusions quickly restored me to my normal health, and a long rest did wonders for Nina and Wynn. But while the doctors all agree that the severed artery in my wrist gradually drained the drug from my system, they are either unwilling or unable to identify the exact drug that Tonda used.

As for the actual transference of souls (call it “voodoo,” or what you please)—the doctors can believe what they choose. Wynn and I know the truth—and so does every mother of every daughter who was trapped in that hellish school.

# THEY SHALL FEED AT MIDNIGHT



*Even if I wanted to, I could no longer hide from myself the fact that I had actually become the reality of the part I was acting—I was truly Lupus, the werewolf! I knew that twice already my ghastly other self had committed horrible murder . . . Was the next victim to be my own lovely Fay?*

## CHAPTER ONE

*Am I a Wolf?*

**T**HE FEAR that tortured me was almost more than I could endure. I had shut myself from the sight of the others directly after the evening



*A Blood-Chilling Novelette* by **RAYMOND WHETSTONE**

meal; the dread and revulsion they were beginning to display toward me was too obvious to be disregarded any longer. Behind the closed door of my room, I felt the cold sweat start out on my body as the light from the flickering candle on the dresser showed me my reflection in the mirror. The face that glared back at me was strained and terrible, with twitching lips and pale, distorted features. Before my eyes I seemed to be changing—turning into a beast!

Could such a thing be? Could an actor so submerge himself in a role that his own

personality would be overpowered by that of the character he had interpreted? Was it possible that in playing Lupus, werewolf and monster, I had brought some awful curse upon myself, was becoming in actual life like the frightful creature I had depicted on the screen?

No, no! Such an idea was too fantastic,

Yes, I had done it—I, Richard Blair!



too incredible! It couldn't be! I had worked so hard in the role that it had affected my nerves. I needed a long rest, a vacation. That was all that was wrong with me. And yet the mirror into which I gazed told me the thing that terrified me so must be happening! Devoid of all make-up now, the captive face that returned my stare was more like the snarling visage of the fiendish monster I had enacted than my own. There was no doubt about it! I was losing all resemblance to myself—to Richard Blair, the young actor! Men-

tally and physically I was taking on the attributes of the dreadful being I had portrayed—the foul beast, Lupus, whose horrible thirst for human blood had driven him to commit unspeakable crimes!

Frantically I reviewed the events of the past few weeks, striving to find a solution to the hideous mystery that was driving me to the brink of madness. A fortnight before, Cameo Productions, the motion picture company of which I was a member, had decided to go to Moon Valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains to complete the horror movie, *The Thing in the Night*. The wild and primitive atmosphere of the region was a perfect setting for the latter half of the film. Besides that, Cameo had succeeded in renting an old, abandoned hunting lodge in this mountain fastness which could be used both as living quarters for the company while they were there, and as a background for the final scenes of the picture.

I was being starred for the first time in my career as Lupus. Linda Travis and Philip Moreno, recently recruited from the legitimate stage, were in the supporting cast. Geoffrey Baker, with a dozen box-office hits to his credit, was the director. Fay Manning, one of the cleverest young writers in Hollywood and the dearest girl in the world to me, had written the original story and scenario for *The Thing in the Night*.

The picture had been finished that day. Most of the company and technical staff had returned to the Hollywood studio that morning, leaving only a few principals still on location. That afternoon we had shot the last scene of *The Thing in the Night*—the big, dramatic scene of the film.

I SHUDDERED now as I remembered what had taken place during that scene. In it I, as Lupus, was supposed to be slain by a silver bullet fired by Philip Moreno, just as I was about to

attack his sweetheart, Linda Travis. But as I stepped in front of the camera, wearing my hideous werewolf makeup, it hadn't seemed as if I was merely playing a part. It had seemed real—horribly real! The trembling girl, cowering there in the snow before me, no longer appeared to be just Linda Travis, the actress. She was my victim, my helpless prey, whose warm, red blood would slake the terrible thirst that maddened me!

I started for her, my lips drawn back from my teeth in a bestial snarl. She saw the look on my face, sensed the awful change that had come over me. There was nothing feigned about the scream that broke from her lips. It was a scream of real and desperate terror as it dawned upon her that I was not merely acting my role of Lupus, but living it! White as death, she recoiled from me in dread and utter loathing.

Originally Linda's scream was to be the cue for Philip Moreno to make his appearance on the set. Darting between us, he was to pretend to shoot the silver bullet into my heart—the only thing, according to legend, that could kill a werewolf. Mortally wounded, I was to sink to the ground in my death throes, the picture ending in the conventional fadeout of the lovers clasped in each other's arms.

But I wasn't thinking then of the way the scene had been rehearsed—the way it was supposed to be played. All I could think of was the uncontrollable desire that had seized me to drink of Linda Travis' life-blood. Instead of dropping in my tracks when Moreno shot, I rushed upon him in a frenzy of rage. My fist lashed out for his chin, sent him reeling backward. Springing upon Linda, I sank my nails into her arms, my eyes clouded by the red mist of madness.

It was only then that Moreno seemed to realize something horrible was wrong. With an effort he recovered from the surprise and shock of my blow, leaped for

me. Yelling hoarsely, he clawed at my shoulder, jerked me loose from my intended victim. Wildly, crazily, he fired another dummy cartridge from his gun so close to me that the exploding powder almost singed my chest.

The sound of that second shot brought me to my senses, made be conscious of what was going on. For a moment I gaped stupidly into Moreno's amazed, frightened countenance. Then the instinct of an actor asserted itself. Once more playing a part, I spun half around, staggered, went down in a crumpled heap. Above my prostrate form Linda Travis sobbed hysterically as she clung to Moreno.

For long, dragging seconds the little group of people who were watching us were like stunned, silent automatons. Then Geoffrey Baker signalled Paul Elliot, the cameraman, to cut the scene. Striding over to me as I got to my feet, the director shook my hand enthusiastically.

"Great work, Blair!" he exclaimed. "You were perfect! But—" he hesitated, eyed me queerly— "weren't you ad-libbing quite a bit toward the last? The script didn't call for you to fight Moreno or actually attack Linda. You—"

"He wasn't acting when he did that!" Linda Travis shrieked suddenly. Her eyes were great pools of horror in her chalk-white face as she stared at me. "He *was* Lupus! He would have murdered me, if Philip hadn't stopped him! There should have been a real bullet in that gun—a silver bullet! He's let that awful role get such a hold on him that he's changing into a werewolf himself! He's more of a beast than a man right now! Look at him and see if I'm not right!"

SHE whirled and fled blindly toward the lodge, Moreno close behind her. Baker watched them disappear inside before he turned to look at me again.

"So you're becoming a werewolf because you played one in a movie?" he snorted. "Of all the crazy things I've ever heard of, that takes the cake; Don't pay any attention to Linda, Blair. She's gone haywire. She doesn't know what she's saying. A man turning into a werewolf in real life! Good God!"

But the director's own tone lacked conviction. There was something about his skepticism that didn't ring true. The uneasiness and doubt in his eyes had grown stronger as his keen glance probed my features. Muttering that he would have to give Paul Elliot some final instructions about the film, he hurried off.

I turned as a hand fell on my arm. Fay Manning was there behind me, her lovely, piquant face anxious and concerned.

"Dick," she murmured, moving nearer. "Dick—"

"Don't come close to me!" I shouted hoarsely. "For God's sake, stay away from me!"

My face must have been terrible as I jerked back from her. I saw the blood drain suddenly from her countenance, her blue eyes grow wide and startled as she stared at me.

"Dick, what's come over you?" she gasped. "Surely you don't put any stock in Linda Travis' silly nonsense—"

"What Linda said was true, Fay!" I groaned. "I—I *wasn't* myself when I played that scene with her! I felt that I *was* Lupus!"

Fay's slim fingers on my lips stopped my words. "You mustn't say it!" she whispered fiercely. "I won't let you! It's only nervous strain that makes you believe anything so preposterous, Dick. It can't be anything else. You're just letting your imagination, coupled with Linda's crazy accusation, delude you into thinking you're changing into a beast like Lupus was supposed to have been. That's all there is to it.

"You'll get over such fancies now that

*The Thing in the Night* is finished and we can leave here, Dick," Fay went on reassuringly. "This place—" she shivered as she indicated the grim, old lodge in its setting of pine trees and desolate reaches of snow—"is enough to give anyone the creeps. Back in town, you'll laugh at your own foolishness in thinking you could ever become a creature like Lupus. The sooner we leave here, the better for all of us. We may be able to get away tonight yet. . ."

If only we could have left that night, the horror that was to come might have been averted! But when we assembled for the evening meal in the big, rustic dining room, Geoffrey Baker refused to let us go before the next day.

"We're staying here at least until tomorrow morning," he declared. "These mountain roads are entirely too dangerous for night travel. It's a bad enough trip at best; after dark it would be suicide to attempt it. I still consider myself in charge of you, still feel I'm responsible for your safety, even though we've completed the picture we've been working on. I'm not going to take the risk of having any of you hurt in an accident, anxious as all of you apparently are to leave immediately."

Consternation swept over every face as the director finished talking. With one accord, everybody in the room shifted in their chairs to look at me. I knew what was the matter with them. It wasn't so much that they were perturbed over the discomfort of spending another night in the cold, old lodge. It was the thought of sleeping again under the same roof with me after what had happened that afternoon! Even Fay Manning seemed to have grown afraid of me now that evening had come on. Though we sat side by side at the table, she did her utmost to keep me from touching her. Once I had chanced to brush against her arm accidentally, and she had shrunk back as if from contact with a venomous snake.

THE fear and aversion that all my companions, especially Fay, had begun to show toward me had been more than I could bear. Complaining of not feeling well, I had retired to my room as soon as the meal was over. Now, staring at myself in the mirror, I knew the mental anguish Dr. Jekyll must have endured when he realized he was turning into Mr. Hyde! A demoniac spirit seemed to be lurking in the back of my eyes, jeering at my helplessness to prevent this ghastly, incredible metamorphosis from taking place! A malignant power was altering my features, transforming them into a hideous monster! And creeping like slow poison through my body was a horrible, insatiable craving—the accursed bloodlust of Lupus, the creature I had created in make-believe!

"He's let that awful role get such a hold on him that he's changing into a werewolf himself!" Linda Travis had said of me. "He's more of a beast than a man right now!"

Sheer nonsense, of course! No sane person could believe anything so absurd! Yet even at that moment, when reason and logic rebelled most against the thought that a demon could have taken possession of me, I was wondering what the taste of Linda's blood would be like! How easy it would be to go to her even yet, rip open that throat, drink of the life blood that would spurt out! Rich, invigorating blood that would quench the dreadful thirst that burned within me. . . . Linda's blood. . . .

I jerked erect with an involuntary cry of horror. In God's name, what was I thinking? I mustn't let my mind dwell upon it! I would go to bed, sleep, forget the frightful desire eating like a maggot into my brain. In the morning all of us would be leaving the sinister, ancient lodge for good. Away from its morbid influence, I felt sure I could shake off the weird obsession that was dominating me and become normal once more.

I tore myself away from the sight of my white, ghastly visage in the mirror, stumbled across the floor. Donning pajamas, I crept between the icy sheets on my bed. Miraculously, sleep came almost immediately.

I started back to wakefulness, shaking in every limb, whimpering like a frightened child. I had had a grisly nightmare, so vivid, so awful that the remembrance of it still filled me with self-loathing. Dawn had come, its gray and chilly light filtering into my room. Automatically I turned to the window. Suddenly I sat bolt upright in bed, staring in dazed unbelief at the outside world.

A fresh snow had fallen during the night—a snow so deep that it had obliterated all evidences of human life! The road to the lodge was blotted out, the lodge itself immured in a dazzling expanse of white. The forest of pines, stretching for miles around, was like an army of ghosts, still, spectral, wrapped in white shrouds. We were captives here just as surely as if the stone walls of a prison had been built around us! It might be days, weeks, before we knew freedom again.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Human Beast

MY FINGERS were all thumbs as I put on my clothes. The low hum of conversation, the fragrant smell of brewing coffee, came to me as I stepped out into the hall. The whole way along the chilly corridor I fought for self-control, strove to banish from my mind the last, hideous fragments of my dream. Tried to convince myself that it couldn't have been anything *but* a dream!

I was expecting a cold reception when I entered the dining room. But everyone was cordial enough. It was as if they were half-ashamed of themselves for the way they had acted toward me the previous

evening. Baker, Philip Moreno, and Paul Elliot nodded a good morning to me almost in unison. Fay Manning smiled and patted the back of the chair next to hers. I sat down beside her, conscious of a feeling of nausea, of an utter distaste for food.

"Can't you eat anything, Dick?" Fay asked as I refused the dish of bacon and eggs she handed me. "And to think I got breakfast myself!" she went on with mock reproach. "You may have to get used to my cooking, young man! From the looks of things, we may be stranded here for some time."

"We should have left yesterday evening," Moreno grumbled, shooting an accusing glance at Geoffrey Baker. "It isn't exactly pleasant to be snow-bound when we could easily have avoided it."

The director's heavy face flushed. He was a man peculiarly sensitive to criticism. "Perhaps I did wrong in keeping you here," he said testily. "But how was I to know we would have a spell of freakish weather like this? Anyway, this snow can't last long," he added. "It's almost the end of February. There's bound to be a thaw soon. . ."

"Linda Travis!" I blurted out. I had to find out for sure about the dread that was torturing me! "Where is she? Why didn't she appear for breakfast?"

There was a startled silence, while all of them stared at me. Then Moreno spoke, a look of sudden alarm on his handsome features.

"Linda usually sleeps late in the morning," he said uneasily. "It's still rather early for her to be up. But maybe one of us would better go waken her. She may—"

He never finished the sentence. Abruptly Fay's scream rang out, high and shrill, cutting like a knife-blade across his words. I whirled to look at her. She was gazing out of the window, her eyes almost starting from their sockets, her face livid with horror.

"Fay!" I gasped. "What on earth's wrong?"

"There's something out there in the snow!" she panted. "Something near the spot where we finished that scene yesterday afternoon! Something that looks like—a human body!"

*A human body!* My heart was in my mouth, the palms of my hands wet and sticky with sweat. Dear God, it hadn't been a dream then! It had actually happened!

We all rushed to the window, crowding, jostling each other, paralyzed suddenly by the sight of a still shape, half-blanketed by its white pall of snow. A motionless, inert shape lying at the foot of a pine tree, exactly where I had seen it in my nightmare!

Geoffrey Baker was the first to turn and race for the door. The rest of us darted after him. On the porch I clutched at Fay, tried to stop her. I must keep her away from that still, ghastly shape! I must!

"Don't come with us!" I choked. "Don't go close to it! Don't, for God's sake! Fay—it's too awful!"

But she wouldn't listen. She shook herself free from my grasp, plunged past me. I followed more slowly, wading hip-deep in snow. I didn't want to reach the others, already grouped around the pine tree. I didn't want to see the thing they were staring at. *I already knew what it looked like!* And yet I stumbled on, dragged to that terrible spot as if by invisible chains, by a force stronger than my will, stronger than the sick horror beating and pounding in my brain!

**T**HE pine branches had partially sheltered Linda Travis' body from the full effects of the night's storm. She sprawled on her back, the thick masses of her black hair making a pillow for her head. She would have appeared as if asleep, had it not been for the look of awful terror and

agony on her dead face, the frightful wound that was like a second mouth in her throat.

Her throat? There was no throat! There was only a yawning hole, riven by savage teeth, a ragged, gaping maw from which the girl's life had ebbed away. And there was no blood in the body! It had been drained of every drop, sucked completely dry. There was no blood on the pallid, frozen flesh, none in the snow. There was no blood anywhere.

In every detail it was the same as it had been in my dream! And now, other incidents in that dream crowded into my mind. My furtive departure from a room with a warm, living burden in my arms . . . my fingers stifling terrified screams . . . the sting of cold air upon my cheeks as I emerged into the winter night . . . a final, strangled shriek as I lowered my struggling burden to the earth, a shriek quickly silenced. . . . Then I was creeping stealthily away from the lifeless husk that had once been a human being, gaining my own room again, exhilarated, refreshed, by the new blood coursing through my veins. . . .

"Linda!" Philip Moreno's voice came to me as if from an incredible distance away. Hoarse, tearing sobs racked him as full realization of what had happened burst upon him. In the midst of my horror, I felt a throb of infinite pity for the grief-stricken man. He had been in love with Linda Travis, had planned to marry her. And now—to find her like this! "Linda, why did it have to be you? What fiend, beast or human, could have done this awful thing to you?"

"It must have been a wild animal!" Fay Manning whispered. "A mountain lion or—or some other fierce and dangerous creature from the forest must have gotten into Linda's room while we were all asleep and carried her off through the window. It—it must have dragged her this far before it killed her, left her body



here for us to find. That must have been it!"

A wild animal? Did Fay really believe that? Or was she simply trying to shield me, keep the others from accusing me of the crime? For surely they must all be suspecting me! They couldn't have forgotten the way I had acted the afternoon before when I played that final scene of *The Thing in the Night* with Linda Travis! They must be recalling her frenzied hysteria when she declared I had tried to kill her even then! And now, since the girl had been slain so hideously, they must all be thinking that I was guilty! Numbly I waited for one of the rest to speak, to turn on me and brand me a fiendish killer!

But nothing of the sort happened! I could have cried out with relief when Paul Elliot nodded slowly, his lean, homely face white to the lips.

"Fay is probably right," he said huskily. "An animal could have done it. There are plenty of them up here in these mountains large enough to do away with a grown man, let alone a defenseless girl. There are no tracks of any animal around Linda's corpse because that heavy snowfall last night blotted them all out. That's it, of course."

**H**OW wrong the cameraman was! I could have told him—all of them—the real truth of that ghastly murder! I had done it! There could be no other explanation for what had come to pass! I could even have told them the exact time that I had committed my hellish crime if the instinct for self-preservation hadn't sealed my lips! It had been midnight in what I had hoped was only a dream, but what I realized now had been hideous reality! I remember that I had heard a clock strike twelve somewhere in the old lodge as I crept through the hall on my ghoulish mission! Midnight, when, according to folklore, the forces of evil on

earth are the most powerful, when the craving for blood is strongest in a werewolf! Midnight, when I, transformed into a beast by some infernal power, had gone forth to hunt down my helpless prey, unable to resist any longer the frightful thirst that maddened me!

"Yes, an animal must have killed Linda!" Philip Moreno's voice, choked with anguish, penetrated through the whirling chaos of my thoughts. "No human being could have been capable of a deed so monstrous! And to think all of us were only a short distance away from her when it happened! To think all of us were asleep when she was attacked! Oh, why didn't I get awake? Why couldn't I have saved her?"

"But it's useless to talk about that now," he continued dully. "That won't bring Linda—back to life. Paul—" his voice broke as he turned to the cameraman—"will you help me carry her body into the lodge? We—we'll have to put it in a room that isn't heated. God knows how long we may be storm-stayed in this dreadful place."

Elliot stepped forward without a word. Between them they lifted the rigid corpse, started off through the snow with it. Fay went on ahead to open the door for them. Mechanically I fell into step beside Geoffrey Baker, feeling like a condemned man who had been granted a reprieve from a sentence of death. Feeling, too, with a sense of utter despair, that it was only a question of time until I would be found out, until one of my companions stumbled upon some clue that would betray my guilt!

That time came when I least expected it would! Slowly the day wore to a close, while I endured the tortures of the damned, hating myself for the thing I was, filled with self-loathing at the cowardice that had kept me silent when Linda's body was found. Again it was still early in the evening when I crept like a hunted

criminal to my room. But I had hardly climbed into pajamas when the door opened suddenly and Geoffrey Baker burst in upon me. One look at the director's pallid, stricken face told me the worst. It was the face of a man who had been stunned, utterly unnerved by some dreadful mental shock.

"I came to you before I spoke to any of the others, Blair," he began jerkily. "I've learned something that puts an entirely different light on Linda Travis' death. It wasn't an animal from the forest that killed her. She was killed by a human fiend—and the murderer is one of us!"

The world reeled and spun before my eyes. I had been anticipating such a discovery, had been steeling myself to face it. But Baker's words had come with such startling abruptness that my wits deserted me. I swayed toward him, my self-control gone completely beneath a quick upsurge of blind panic.

"The murderer is one of us?" I quavered. "Good God, man, do you realize what you're saying? There—there must be some mistake—"

"There's no mistake," he broke in hoarsely. "I know what I'm talking about! Listen, Blair. I wasn't satisfied from the beginning with Fay Manning's theory that a wild animal had killed Linda. After all of you had returned to the lodge, I went back to that pine tree where we found the poor girl's body. This time I saw what none of us had noticed before. Hanging on one of the branches was this."

His right hand stretched out toward me. Clutched in his fingers was a shred of blue cloth. "It must have been torn from the murderer's clothing while he was struggling with Linda," he said huskily. "My God, Blair, what are we going to do?"

It was sheer instinct that impelled me to jerk my hand swiftly to the sleeve of my pajama coat. But swift as was that gesture, it wasn't quick enough to hide the

damning thing that was there—the jagged rent in the fabric from which that shred of blue had come.

## CHAPTER THREE

### I Confess . . .

**H**ORROR leaped suddenly into Baker's eyes. He had seen. The tell-tale bit of cloth in his fingers fluttered to the floor as he gaped at me in dazed unbelief.

"You, Blair?" he choked. "No! It can't be!"

"Yes, I did it," I muttered thickly. "Linda was right when she said I was turning into a werewolf, Baker! All last night I tried to fight off the terrible thirst that had come over me. But it was useless! It—it overpowered me in my sleep, made me go to Linda's room. At first I thought it might be just a dream. But now—I know it really happened! It was hunger, Baker—an awful, burning hunger for her blood that was like a raging fever in my veins! A hunger so irresistible that I could endure it no longer! Even now that same hunger is growing inside me again. . . ."

He was backing away from me, edging toward the door. His face was gray with terror, his lips moving without making a sound.

"I'll tell the others in the morning," I said dully. "I'll surrender to the police when we leave here. You—you'd better go now, Baker. And lock your door when you go to bed. *Lock your door if you want to be safe tonight!*"

The door to my room slammed shut behind him. He was gone. I turned and lurched across the floor, feeling curiously giddy and light-headed. Tomorrow they would all know what Baker knew about me now. Tomorrow I would have to confess to my hellish crime. But that thought, instead of filling me with despair and panic now, gave me, oddly enough, a sense

of peace. It was better that way. Better to confess and take my punishment than to go on killing others as I had killed Linda Travis. Better for the world to be rid of such a creature as I had become.

A deathly weariness was like a physical weight upon me as I crawled into bed. Incredibly, I fell asleep almost at once.

It seemed hours later when I recovered consciousness. For a moment I lay still, stupid with drowsiness, hovering on the borderland between sleep and complete wakefulness. Then abruptly I jerked erect, quivering with terror, icy sweat trickling down my armpits. Like a band of hideous spectres, the events of the preceding day were crowding back into my mind. But that was not the worst. That was not the quintessence of the horror upon me. With those memories had come another, more ghastly, more frightful, than anything that had gone before.

Again I had dreamed! But this time there was nothing dim and fragmentary about that dream. I remembered everything about it. Every detail was etched as if by acid upon my naked brain. Again, as though in a grisly nightmare, I had crept from my room, impelled by the fiend within me to take another human life!

I clenched my teeth, bit my lips to choke back the scream swelling in my throat. And then, even as I sat there, numbed, rigid, footsteps thudded along the hallway. Someone pounded on the door of the bedroom opposite mine. Someone called, first softly, then loudly, in a frenzy of alarm and dread.

I sprang out of bed, threw on a bathrobe. Darting out into the hall, I almost collided with Paul Elliot. He was standing in front of the door to Geoffrey Baker's bedroom, beating a frantic tattoo on the closed panel. Never had I seen the cameraman's face so white and grim. He swung around to stare at me, his thin, angular body shaking from head to foot.

"What—what is it?" I panted. But

even then I knew. Even then my very flesh was shrinking in horror from the thought of what lay behind that door. "Paul, for God's sake, what's wrong?"

He swallowed convulsively. "I don't know," he whispered. "But a little while ago I heard a queer sound inside Baker's room—a sound like a muffled cry. I didn't pay much attention to it then. I was half asleep at the time. But then I began to think I'd better investigate. I—"

He broke off to knock again. There was no answer, no movement of any sort behind the door. There was only a silence as complete and absolute as death itself.

FROM up the hall came the rapid patter of bare feet, and Philip Moreno joined us. The dim light of the candle flickering in a wall bracket above his head intensified the pallor of his face. He didn't need to ask us what was the matter. He could read the answer in our eyes.

"Is the door locked?" he rasped.

Elliot nodded.

"Then I don't see how anything—" Moreno stopped abruptly, and I could tell the same thought that was torturing me had occurred to him. A locked door was no precaution in this case. There was another way by which Baker's room could have been entered that night.

"We mustn't wait any longer," Elliot gasped. "We must find out for sure—what's wrong."

We flung ourselves against the door. The hinges creaked protestingly, then gave suddenly. There was a crash of splintering wood as we burst into the room.

A candle still burned on the dresser. The single window was tightly closed against the cold of the winter night. And on the bed sprawled a still and lifeless thing—the mutilated corpse of Geoffrey Baker. His glazed, sightless eyes stared up at us, his mouth half open as though still silently screaming. As in the case of Linda Travis, the director's throat had

been frightfully torn by savage teeth, was nothing more than a yawning hole that gaped from ear to ear. Again we looked upon death in one of its most horrible forms—a human body drained entirely of its blood.

I stood perfectly still, sick with remorse and self-hatred as I gazed down at this latest example of my handiwork. Yes, I had done it—I, Richard Blair, driven insane by the werewolf's accursed thirst. It had been *my* fingers that had stifled Baker's cries when he fought for his life. *My* teeth had mangled his flesh, had made that awful wound in his throat. His body lay there exactly as I had seen it in my nightmare.

A nightmare? No, it hadn't been that. It had been, rather, a vague consciousness, a blurred realization, of the atrocious things my physical self was doing. It couldn't have been anything else. There could be no other explanation for what had occurred.

A strangled shriek behind us whirled us all around. Fay Manning stood in the doorway, gazing in utter horror at what was on the bed. She swayed back and forth on her feet, would have crumpled to the floor if I hadn't sprung forward and caught her.

"We've got to face the facts now." Moreno's voice was like the lash of a whip across my brain. "No animal did this. And no animal killed—Linda! We were wrong from the beginning! Both deaths must have been the work of a wanton, human murderer—a murderer who is among us now! A murderer agile enough to climb through that transom above poor Baker's door and rip the life out of him!"

Yes, that was the way I had reached my victim. Crazed by my thirst for blood, I had managed to pull myself up to the transom, force it open, and slip through to drop to the floor on the other side. My dazed eyes swung to a clock beside the candle on the dresser. It was half-past

twelve now. The hands of that clock, I remember, had pointed to midnight when I had entered the room before. It had been just a half hour ago since I had crept toward the bed where Geoffrey Baker lay asleep, my fingers shaping into claws, my lips drawn back from my teeth in a wolfish snarl.

"We've got to get help here immediately," Moreno was saying hoarsely. "We must find some way to send for the police at once! God knows which one of us the murderer will attack next if he isn't stopped!"

I felt Fay's slim body shudder, felt her draw suddenly away from me. An iron ring seemed riveted around my neck, stifling me. Yes, any of them might be next, even Fay! At that very moment she was in danger! Try as I might, I couldn't keep my eyes from straying now to her own throat! To the long, ivory column of her throat where a pulse beat and fluttered like a tiny heart!

**D**EEP inside me two forces were warring, struggling for supremacy. One was sheer, animal instinct that impelled me to hide my guilt. The other was the realization of what might happen to the girl I loved if I remained silent. Sooner or later the madness would strike again. And this time it might be Fay herself whose blood would feed the monster within me!

There was only one outcome to that struggle—one of those two frightful alternatives I could choose. Slowly my despair yielded to resignation. Slowly I turned to look into Moreno's white face.

"It won't be necessary to get the police here to trap the murderer, Phil," I said dully. "I'll confess. I'll give myself up. I . . . killed them."

It was done. For what seemed ages there was a breathless silence, a deathlike hush in the room. Then an anguished cry of unbelief burst from Fay's lips, and she

turned to the rest like a tigress defending its mate.

"No! no!" she sobbed wildly. "Dick didn't do it! He couldn't have! Don't listen to him! He—he doesn't know what he's saying!"

But I was determined not to let her shield me any longer. I began to speak again, the words pouring from my throat in a ghastly flood.

I told them everything that happened: my conviction that I had changed into a werewolf, the frightful thing that had taken possession of me, the hideous dreams that had become terrible realities. And throughout that gruesome recital, Fay's voice continued to throb in an agony of denial of my guilt.

I finished at last, waited for the inevitable storm to break. I saw the look of stunned horror on Philip Moreno's features change to hate and loathing. I saw him leap for me, his face distorted with mad fury.

"You monster!" he shrieked. "You filthy, murdering beast! I would never have believed you could have done such a fiendish thing to Linda if I hadn't heard the truth from your own lips! You'll pay for it! I'll tear out your heart with my bare hands!"

**G**OD knows where it might have ended if Paul Elliot hadn't pulled the vengeance-crazed man back.

"Don't, Phil," he said thickly. "There's been enough of killing already. Let the authorities take care of him. Madera, the county seat, is only about five or six miles from here. I can make it there on snowshoes and return with the sheriff. That's the only way to handle this. . . ."

Elliot's words took effect. Moreno's rage ebbed away, leaving him pale and twitching.

"Yes," he whispered at last. "You're right, Paul. It's a terrible thing to kill a man, fiend though he may be. It's better

to turn this devil over to the law for punishment. But go for the sheriff right away. Go before I lose all control of myself and do something I might be sorry for afterward!

"No, wait!" he rasped, as Elliot started to leave the room to prepare for his long journey. "There's another thing to attend to before you go, Paul. Blair—" Moreno swung on me venomously "—I want you to write down a full account of what you've just told us for Paul to take along and deliver to the sheriff. I'm not going to run the risk of having you change your testimony, try to lie out of what you've done, after the police take charge of you. There's some paper you can use on the table in the living room. Come along!"

Fay caught at my arm, her lips moving as though about to speak. But instead, she turned away abruptly, fled blindly out into the hall. I heard the swift rush of her feet as she made for her room. I heard the door open, close again on her racking sobs.

Numbly I followed Moreno. It was the hardest thing I had ever done to pen that ghastly confession. Many times my hand faltered, and the words blurred and ran together in front of my eyes. But at last it was finished. Moreno read through it hurriedly, passed it to Elliot. I saw the cameraman stuff those damning sheets of paper into his pocket, saw his lanky form stride to the front and vanish into the night.

"That's that," I said woodenly. "I'll be ready for the sheriff when he comes. Do you mind if I wait in my room—for him?"

"Good God, no!" Moreno's eyes blazed with hate. "I'll be glad to have you out of my sight! But don't try to pull any funny stuff, Blair! I still have the gun we used in filming the picture. And it's loaded with real bullets now. I won't hesitate to shoot you down like a mad dog, the first false move you make!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Madman's Fantasy

INSIDE my own room again, I sank down upon the bed. It was all over. There was nothing left but a slow agony of waiting. Waiting for the police to come for me. Waiting for the doom that lay ahead—death in the electric chair, or something even worse, the living death of an insane asylum. There was no possible way to escape the fate that loomed before me. Unless. . . .

"Dick!"

I leaped to my feet with an incoherent cry. Fay had entered the room so quietly that I had never heard her. She was very close to me, so close that the odor of the perfume she wore was in my nostrils, intoxicating me. Gleams from the candle on the dresser made a shining nimbus of her hair. Grief and horror had painted dark circles under her eyes. But for all of that, the face she lifted to mine was a vision of haunting loveliness, a face almost unearthly in its beauty.

"Dick!" she murmured again.

"Get out!" I muttered hoarsely. God, how I wanted to sweep her into my arms, cover her lips with kisses! But I didn't dare! For her sake, I didn't dare touch her! "Get out and let me alone!"

"Dick, I can't! I won't! Darling, we love each other. I won't let this thing separate us—forever! I won't let you sacrifice yourself for something you didn't do! I know you couldn't have committed those awful crimes! I know it! It—it isn't in your nature to harm anyone. . . ."

I backed toward the door away from her, fighting the least within me, fighting with all my strength the terrible hunger that was rising again like a crimson flood in my brain.

"You fool!" I snarled. "Why, right now it's all I can do to keep from springing on you! Right now I want to—"

"No, Dick," she said calmly. "I can't believe that. I know you better than you know yourself. You—you're not the thing you think you are, dear. If you were—"

She stopped suddenly, her body taut and listening.

"Fay, what is it?" I gasped. "What startled you?"

She shivered as though a cold wind had blown over her. "I thought I heard a queer noise somewhere in the lodge just now," she whispered. "But it must have been only my imagination. To get back to what we were talking about, Dick. If—if you were the fiend responsible for the deaths of Linda Travis and Geoffrey Baker, you would never have admitted it. You wouldn't be trying to keep from harming me—now. You would have hidden your guilt and kept on killing without the slightest qualm of conscience. No, you didn't do it, Dick. You're the victim of some terrible plot! Someone else committed those murders and is trying to pin the blame on you! Someone who has a good reason for wishing us all out of the way!"

"Someone else?" I echoed stupidly. "But who?"

"That's what we've got to find out, Dick. We must figure out some way to catch the real killer before the sheriff gets here. If we don't—"

Abruptly, Fay's voice died away. She wasn't looking at me at all anymore! She was looking past me—at something behind me!—unutterable terror in her staring eyes. My back was toward the open door. But still I could feel the presence of some abysmal evil, some awful horror creeping stealthily through the shadowy hall.

"Dick!" Fay shrieked. "Dick, look out! Oh, my God!"

Too late I tried to spin around. Something descended with bone-crushing force on the back of my skull. There was a moment of frightful agony, a sudden blinding

flare of pain. Then everything dissolved into nothingness, as black oblivion claimed me.

**C**ENTURIES later I opened dull, suffering eyes. From out of the dimness a face glared down at me. Cruel, savage, ruthless, it was contorted into a mask of fiendish glee, the eyes burning hot and terrible in their sockets, the lips twisted in a ghoulish smile. And beyond that mad face a white, slender body slumped against the wall—Fay! Tied hand and foot, she seemed sunk in a stupor, paralyzed by fear and terror.

Red fury seethed like liquid fire through my veins. Mouthing curses, I tried to leap to my feet, reach the inhuman devil confronting me, get my fingers around his throat. But all my efforts were useless. I couldn't so much as lift myself from the floor. There were cords around my own wrists and ankles, biting into my flesh, holding me fast. The mad face watched me, gloating over my helplessness.

"So you've snapped out of it, Blair? I'm glad! I wouldn't have had you miss the last act of my little show for anything!"

"Elliot!" I husked. "Paul Elliot! I can't believe it! I—I never thought—"

"You never thought I was behind what's been going on!" The cameraman cackled fiendishly. "Neither did Philip Moreno! Like you, the poor sap didn't suspect me once. Even when I offered to go after that hick sheriff, he didn't tumble to what I was really up to. He never dreamed I was going to sneak back as soon as he was alone and off his guard and let him have it! Moreno's lying dead in the living room now, murdered the same way Linda Travis and Geoffrey Baker were, Blair! Murdered apparently by you, just as you figured Linda and Baker had been!"

Numbly I gaped at him, too dazed to speak. At last I was beginning to under-

stand how I had been duped. How all along this monster had used me to conceal his own hellish guilt!

"You were so sure it was you who had bumped off Linda and Baker, weren't you?" he chuckled. "Well, let me set your mind at rest, Blair. You didn't kill them. You don't have the guts or the courage to ever become a dangerous criminal. But that's not going to prevent you from taking the blame for what I did myself! That's not going to keep the police from thinking you were the murderer when I finally bring them here—"

Freezing horror crept through me as I caught the meaning underlying his words. If only I could keep him talking, delay the inevitable as long as possible! If only I could keep his attention from centering on Fay, so incredibly lovely, there in the shadows! But already he was turning, shifting around, seeking her out—

"Paul, how did you manage to do it?" I babbled frenziedly. "How did you make me think? . . ."

Unutterable relief flooded over me as his blazing eyes swung back again to my face. "It was a cinch, Blair," he said contemptuously. "Ever since we came here, I've been slipping dope into your coffee, your water, everything you drank. For days I've been feeding you certain drugs that made a physical wreck of you—drugs that broke down your red corpuscles and caused an instinctive craving for the body-building properties of blood your system was being denied. That's why you became convinced you were turning into a werewolf. That's why it was so easy to make you think you were the murderer when those deaths began to occur. . . ."

"But your motive?" I stammered. "Why did you plan all this in the first place?"

**"R**EALLY, you're very stupid, Blair!" he sneered. "You should have been able to guess that by this time.

It's money I'm after—a fortune from the picture we've just finished! You know as well as I do the conditions under which *The Thing in the Night* was made. There were six of us who were to have had a share in the box-office receipts instead of regular salaries—Linda Travis, Geoffrey Baker, Philip Moreno, Fay Manning, you and myself. I was certain from the beginning that the film was bound to be a sure-fire hit when released. I wasn't satisfied with just one-sixth of the proceeds when I could get sole control of the whole thing for myself. I made up my mind even before we came here that I was going to eliminate the others and get their shares as well as my own. . . ."

"And you decided to get rid of those other shareholders in such a way that it would add enormously to the potential value of the pictures whose profits you wanted to monopolize!" I burst out furiously. "If you could make it appear that I, the star of *The Thing in the Night*, had gone insane and killed the other principals, it would mean wonderful horror publicity! With such a story associated with it, movie fans would fall over themselves crowding into the theatres to see the film!"

"Precisely, Blair!" the fiend snarled. "And all of you played right into my hands!" he went on gloatingly. "When Linda Travis got hysterics and accused you of being a werewolf during the shooting of that final scene, it suited my purpose exactly! She couldn't have done any better if I had been coaching her! And Geoffrey Baker, innocently enough, helped matters along by refusing to let us leave here that night. With such a set-up, it was natural for me to select Linda as my first victim. This is the murder weapon I used on her and the others, in case you are interested, Blair!"

Revulsion churned in my stomach as my eyes focused on the thing he held up for me to see. It looked like a stiletto,

except that the edges of the blade, instead of being straight, were jagged like the teeth of a saw. Attached to the handle was a bulbous swelling from which dangled a bag whose fabric glinted oddly in the candlelight.

"That blade is hollow, like a hypodermic needle," he explained. "A tube runs the hilt to that bulb, and then into the bag. Stabbing the point into my victim's jugulars, I pumped the blood out of them with that bulb, pumped it into the bag until their bodies were entirely dry. Afterward I enlarged the wounds with the sawlike edges of the blade to make it look as if their throats had been ripped open by human teeth—*your* teeth, Blair!"

Yes, the net of horror he had woven to enmesh me and the rest was becoming all too clear now. God, I must keep him talking, still find some way to save Fay and myself! I must!

"You also tore a piece of cloth from my pajamas while I was asleep and planted it near Linda's corpse to further incriminate me!" I said hoarsely.

"Of course. Baker told you about that bit of evidence, didn't he?"

My bound hands were creeping over the floor behind me. Groping, searching frantically for the penknife I had dropped when I undressed for bed that evening and had neglected to pick up again. If only I could find that penknife now! If only—

"I—I understand about the dope you gave me and most of what else you did, Paul," I prodded, stalling desperately for time. "But what about those nightmares? How did you manage them?"

His laugh rang out, wild, unearthly, mirthless. "Yes, those nightmares!" he cried. "They were my masterstroke. The drugs I fed you also acted as a powerful hypnotic, leaving your sleeping mind completely at my mercy. I came to your room and dictated every incident in those dreams to you—impressed every detail of



them so clearly on your brain that it was as if you had actually committed the murders!

"My original idea was to drive you mad, have you end up in the electric chair or an insane asylum. But I've decided that it will be better to dispose of you by putting a bullet through your head—a bullet from the gun I took from Moreno when I polished him off. First, however, I'll get rid of dear, little Fay here!"

**H**E WAS moving toward her like a stalking, jungle beast. I saw the muscles of her throat swell in a scream of terror. I saw her eyes dilate with fear and horror as she tried to shrink away from him.

"You can't get away with it!" I shrieked wildly. "You can't!" My fingers had closed on the thing I had been seeking behind me. My hands were working, working frantically against time. "You—"

"Don't be a fool, Blair. Of course I can. After I'm finished here, I'll go for the sheriff. When I bring him back, he'll find Moreno's corpse in the living room, Fay lying dead in here with her throat ripped open, and you beside her, a bullet in your skull and the gun that fired the shot in your fingers. I'll tell the sheriff that you must have gone berserk while I was away, killed Moreno and Fay, and then committed suicide in a fit of remorse. And he'll believe me! You damned yourself with that confession Moreno made you write. Oh, it's perfect! No one will ever guess what really happened! No one will ever suspect that I did it all!"

He bent over Fay, his ghastly murder weapon poised directly above her throat. For a moment he held it there, revelling in her terror and agony. And then, just as the keen blade started down, I lurched to my feet. With a bestial howl of hate and rage, I sprang across the room and flung myself at him.

Momentarily I caught the fiend off guard. He hadn't noticed the furtive motion of my hands as they closed on the penknife I had been searching for so desperately. He hadn't seen me saw clumsily at the thongs binding my wrists, slash through the ropes around my ankles in turn. His first warning of danger came when, roaring with fury, I struck his murder weapon from his fingers, sent it clattering to the floor. My hands, shaping into talons, darted for his neck.

But they didn't fasten there. Despite his surprise, Elliot recovered from the shock of my attack with almost incredible swiftness. Dodging my frenzied lunge, he lashed out at me with his clenched fist. The blow, with all the strength of his body behind it, caught me full on the jaw.

Flaming arrows of anguish shot through my brain. My legs turned water-weak beneath me, and I careened backward. Only the wall, as my shoulders crashed against it, kept me upright. For an instant I leaned there, dazed, only half-conscious. Then I threw myself forward again, crazed by hate and despair, obsessed solely by the thought that I must reach the monster before he could turn once more on the girl I loved.

For the first time there was fear in Paul Elliot's glaring eyes as he swung to meet my mad rush. His face went white and his hand jerked to the revolver bulging in his coat pocket. Whipping it out, he snouted the muzzle straight at my head.

"Stop!" he panted. "Stop, damn you! Another step and I'll blow your brains out!"

**B**UT I had lost all caution now. He was going to shoot me anyway. Why stand there meekly, awaiting my own death, while he did as he willed with Fay! Why not risk everything on the wild hope that I might yet save her!

I saw Elliot's fingers tighten on the trigger as I charged. Gunfire blasted in

my eardrums, deafening me. Three times the revolver spat leaden death. Three times he fired pointblank at me before I could reach him. But amazingly, I felt none of the slugs biting into my flesh! I felt no shock from the bullets at all! I heard the fiend's thin squeak of terror as I grappled with him. Wrenching the weapon from his grasp, I pounded and smashed at his unprotected head with it. I never stopped until he wilted, until he lay motionless at my feet, his skull crushed to a crimson pulp.

It was only then that the murder mist faded from before my eyes. I turned away with a shudder, staggered toward Fay's inert body. Cutting the ropes that bound her, I strained her to me.

There is little to add. Fay refused to wait until daylight to leave the lodge, insisted that we get away as soon as we could dress and pack a few of our belongings. It was still dark when we fled from the awful place, fled from the ghastly horror that had happened there. After an hour of battling snowdrifts, we finally reached Madera. There I hunted up the sheriff and told him everything that had occurred, succeeded in proving my complete innocence of the crimes Paul Elliot had tried to pin on me.

That was two years ago. The doctors assure me that I am completely cured of the effects of the drug that was administered to me; that I am a perfectly normal

man again in every respect. Fay and I are married now. We have tried to forget the past, never talk about it, even to each other.

But there is one thing I can't forget—one thing that still tortures me. Why did none of the bullets from Elliot's gun have any effect on me. Why wasn't I even wounded in that last, desperate struggle with him?


Is it possible that the fiend got so rattled when I charged him that he missed me entirely all three times? Or is there another, more fantastic reason for something I have never been able to understand? Could it be that the role I played in that movie *did* change me—transform me into a creature that only a silver bullet could kill? Is that the real explanation why I escaped being shot down by Elliot's leaden slugs?

No, no! I can't believe that! Such an idea is too preposterous! There isn't such a thing as a werewolf, let alone a man turning into one!

It was just Paul Elliot's fiendish machinations that made me think that in the first place!

And yet, sometimes I wonder. Sometimes, when I get awake at night and bend over my sleeping wife, a deadly fear throttles me. I can't keep myself from staring at her lovely throat, glaring at it, watching it like . . . *like a hungry wolf about to spring!*

THE END




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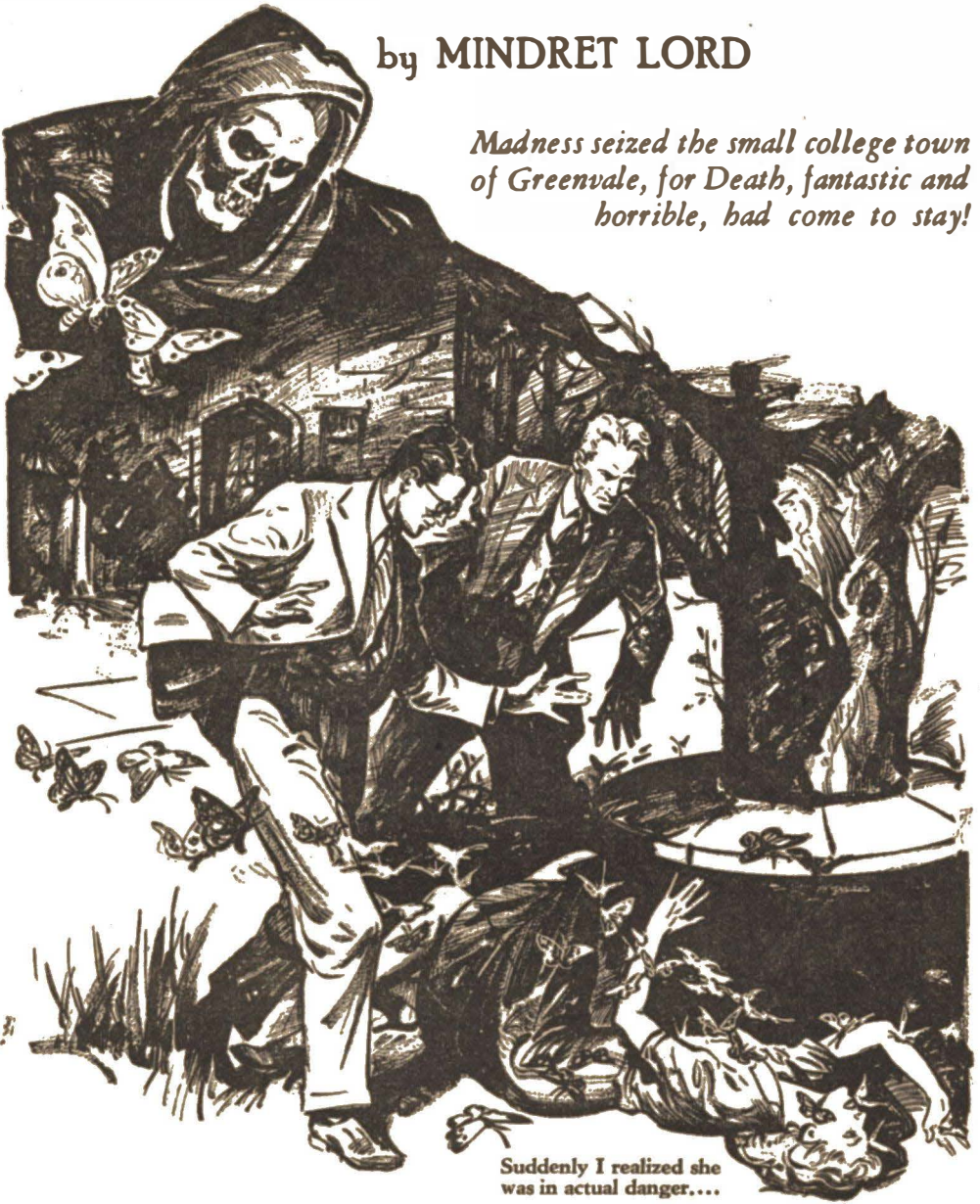
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# COLLEGE OF CORPSES

by MINDRET LORD

*Madness seized the small college town of Greenvale, for Death, fantastic and horrible, had come to stay!*



Suddenly I realized she was in actual danger....

SOMETIMES we talk about the "Laws of Nature," implying in the use of the phrase that all animal life on this planet is regulated by certain definite, well-ordered rules of conduct. But when nature breaks its own laws, rising in mad revolt against its normal habit, chaos

is the result—such chaos and terror as came to Greenvale.

Greenvale was a typical, peaceful college town—the last place in the world in which to expect a violent outbreak of what appeared to be *insanity* in nature. It began in a way that was strange, but not

entirely horrible. At least, it did not seem so—then. . . .

I was walking across the campus toward the chemistry building, when I noticed Jo Ann Lane coming in my direction. I stopped and waited for her, admiring the grace and youthful strength of that lithe body in its tight sweater and brief skirt. When she was about fifty yards from me, a couple of butterflies dropped out of the sky to land fluttering in her hair. She brushed them away, but they rose only a few inches and settled again. Amazingly, more butterflies were gathering around her, and with every step the swarm increased until, within perhaps ten seconds, she was completely clothed in the brilliant, clinging insects. I had never seen anything like it, and it occurred to me that Jo Ann must have bathed in some perfume that attracted them irresistibly.

Jo Ann opened her mouth, either to laugh or to say something to me. Instantly two or three of the butterflies fluttered between her lips. Others were flapping their wings against her eyes—and suddenly I realized that the girl was in actual distress, that she could neither breathe nor see.

I rushed to her and tried to beat off the ever increasing cloud of beautiful but none-the-less menacing insects, but it was like the futile struggle of a nightmare—for every butterfly that was killed or brushed away, two appeared. Oddly they paid no attention to me, but concentrated on covering the girl with a choking, blinding blanket of iridescent wings.

I was leaning over Jo Ann, trying to shield her face, when suddenly from above, a coat dropped over her head. I glanced up to see Martin Harley, a classmate of mine, in shirt sleeves. "There!" he said. "That will keep them off!"

Jo Ann had fainted. I picked up her limp body—her head covered by Harley's coat—and carried her into the chemistry building. At the door, Harley beat off as

many of the following swarm of butterflies as he could. I laid her down on the nearest bench and threw the coat aside. Even now, her hair, face, throat and shoulders were coated with crushed, spasmodically twitching butterflies. As I picked them away from her mouth, nose and eyes, I discovered that it was necessary to crush the life out of each individual to prevent their returning to her skin.

When Martin Harley joined me at Jo Ann's side, I said, "Get a glass of water, will you, Harley? I'll tend to this myself." There was something about his eyes, so magnified behind his thick-lensed glasses, that I had never liked—and I liked them even less now as he stood opposite me, staring down at Jo Ann's unconscious body.

**H**ARLEY muttered something under his breath and left me. By the time he returned with the water, the last of the butterflies was dead and lying with the others in a tattered pile upon the floor. I took the glass, cradled Jo Ann's head in my left arm and poured a few drops into her mouth. She shuddered slightly, her eyes opened and slow recognition came into them. "Tom! What—what happened?"

"You're all right," I told her. "Believe it or not, you were attacked by a swarm of butterflies—but you're all right now, thank God!"

She nodded, gazing at me questioningly. "It was horrible! But Tom—*why?*"

"Were you wearing some new kind of perfume?"

"No. I haven't had any new perfume in ages—"

"Look!" It was Harley, pointing at the windows. His watery eyes seemed almost to be popping from his head. "Look at them!"

The windows were so completely covered by butterflies that scarcely a ray of

outside sunlight penetrated into the laboratory. Jo Ann screamed and her hands flew to her throat. "They're after me—they've gone crazy—"

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "Obviously what's happened is simply that the butterflies are swarming in this spot—just like bees do. They just happened to light on you—and on those windows—"

"I don't agree." Harley peered at me curiously. "In my opinion, Jo Ann is absolutely right in—"

I interrupted: "I don't give a damn about your opinion. All I want to do is get her out of here. My car is parked near here. I'll bring it right up to the door."

The outside of the door was plastered with butterflies, but when I returned with my car and rushed Jo Ann out of the building, only a few managed to light upon her. These she killed as I drove her to the Sorority house where she lived.

Starting up the steps, we were met by a gangling, raw-boned young woman who exclaimed, "Why, what's the matter, dear? What's happened?"

Jo Ann passed her without answering and we entered the hall.

"Who was that?" I asked. "Somehow she doesn't look like quite the kind of girl you have in your sorority."

"She's not—that's Minna Delius. She's a post-graduate student in biology and she coaches some of us."

The subject was certainly not important, and I changed it. "Take a bath," I said, "even if it isn't Saturday night. Maybe whatever you've got on you that attracts butterflies will wash off. And don't go out again until I'm with you—"

Jo Ann smiled at my feeble humor; we heard somebody coming down the stairs, and since no man was permitted inside the house, I kissed her hastily, and left.

**T**HE Delius woman was waiting beside my car. As I slid behind the wheel, she asked me, "Aren't you Tom Shane?"

Jo Ann has told me so much about you that—"

She apparently expected me to start some sort of light conversation, but I was not in the mood to be polite. She went on, regardless: "I wonder if you are going to drive past the chapel, because if you are, perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a lift?"

I threw open the door and growled, "Get in."

Without consciously listening to what she said, I gathered the impression that she was complaining about what a hard life she led—her laboratory work was so difficult—she had no money, which made it necessary for her to coach younger students—men never took her out because she had no pretty clothes—and so on. At one point she said, "I am a brilliant biologist, Mr. Shane—even though I say so myself. And yet I actually have to do menial jobs like house cleaning, just to live! I suppose I ought to be grateful to people like Dr. Exmoor for *letting* me clean their houses—but can you imagine how I feel?"

I muttered something unconsoling, and a few moments later drew up to the curb in front of the chapel. Minna Delius thanked me whiningly, and I was just about to drive off when I heard what sounded like screaming behind the chapel's heavy doors. I jumped out of the car and started forward—and I remember being somewhat surprised to see that Delius had not entered the building, but was still standing outside, apparently listening. The shrill screaming grew in volume as I threw open the doors and peered into the dark interior. As I held the door open in momentary indecision, three large rats raced across my feet and scampered *into* the chapel.

On the platform there was a mound of gray and it was from there that the smothered cries were coming. Starting down the aisle, I heard Harley's voice

behind me: "I saw your car out in front and I wanted to talk to you about—"

"For God's sake!" I yelled. "Can't you see what's happening? Help me!"

Because of his dim eye-sight, he was probably not aware of the frightful tragedy that was drawing to its gruesome conclusion. By the time we reached that stinking mound of gray fur and needle-sharp teeth, there was not enough left of Dr. Exmoor's features to recognize. Luckily for the poor, kindly old man, he died while we were still trying to drag his torn body away from the growing pack of rats.

It must have been more than an hour later that I found myself alone again with Martin Harley. I was still sick at my stomach—shaking in the reaction to the horror of Dr. Exmoor's death—and I was in no condition for Harley's long-winded discourse. But ignoring my obvious desire to be let alone, he began by saying: "You know, I believe there's something fishy about this butterfly and rat business. I think both attacks were caused by the same thing—"

"What thing?"

He stared at me—stupidly, I thought. "If we knew that—we would know something. But just the same, there's a definite resemblance between those butterflies attacking Jo Ann, and the rats going for the old man."

"Resemblance, my foot!" I snorted. "It's nothing more than a coincidence. Other people have been attacked by rats before now—and probably the same is true of butterflies. Just because they happen within an hour of each other—"

"No, that's not what I mean." Harley interrupted. "There are other points of similarity. Did you notice that none of the butterflies touched us, and none of the rats did, either? Were you bitten?"

"What of it?" I asked.

"I don't know. But I'm beginning to form a theory—"

"Well," I said, "you go away and have your theory by yourself. I want to stop thinking about it. Go talk to Minna Delius. She's a scientist like you—and come to think of it, I saw her in the chapel while we were fighting those damned rats."

WHEN I called Jo Ann, late that afternoon, I was glad to hear her voice sounding much less frightened. She told me that shortly after I had left her, a huge swarm of butterflies had flown against her bedroom window. However, she had bathed herself thoroughly with the strongest soap she could find, and shortly afterwards, they had all disappeared.

"I can't imagine what I had on me that attracted them," she said, "but whatever it was, it's gone now. Just the same, though, this place is giving me the willies. Bill Regan's calling for Louise to take her for a drive in the country. Shall we go with them?"

"Good idea," I said. "I'd like to get away from this lunatic asylum for a while, myself."

In Bill's car the four of us drove out along the turnpike without any particular destination in mind. Regan was an easy-going chap who divided his time in college between football, basketball, and Louise Aylesworth. She was the true type of statuesque, golden-haired goddess—which though it is certainly beautiful, does not appeal to me with the force of Jo Ann's impertinent loveliness.

Naturally, it was difficult to avoid discussion of the hideous fate of Dr. Exmoor, but after half an hour or so in the clean, open air, I think we all began to take a more rational view of the matter. It sounded fairly convincing when Regan suggested that a ferret must have gotten loose somewhere on the college grounds—that it entered a rat hole in the chapel—with the result I saw.

"I've heard it said," Regan remarked, "that when professional rat catchers use ferrets, they put the animal in a hole, and then get out of the building and lock the door until the last rat is dead. They go crazy and will actually climb right up your body to get away from the ferret."

Just off the road, about fifteen miles from Greenvale there is a heavily wooded hill—a favorite spot for romantic couples. Bill Regan stopped his car at the foot of the trail that winds to the top, and said, "Let's go up and see the sunset."

Willingly, Jo Ann and I started ahead, Louise and Bill only a few feet behind us. The girls were gossiping about a beauty contest which was to be held that night at the Scott Hotel on Crystal Lake. It was to be some sort of college affair, and one of their sorority sisters—an exotic Mexican girl named Carmelita Gomez—was entered in the contest. We were all planning to go, when Jo Ann suddenly stopped and said in a hushed voice: "Tom! What's that noise?"

I listened. Behind us, Bill and Louise were quiet, too.

"It's nothing," I said. "Just the wind rustling the leaves—"

"But there isn't any wind! It's absolutely still!"

Jo Ann was right. There was no breeze—yet there was a distinct murmur of rustling leaves. And the sound seemed to come not from the tops of trees, but from the ground. As we stood there, wondering, the sound grew louder and closer.

Louise said, "I'm going back to the car." There was panic in the words. And there was panic in our hearts—the desperate fear of the unknown.

Louise took a step or two down the trail—and then, with a scream of terror, she threw herself back against Bill. Blocking the path ahead was a solid, squirming carpet of snakes. I whirled—a similar carpet was spreading down from above . . . .

There are no words for that horror.

Swiftly passing us by, the serpents streaked up Louise's legs and over her body. She fell, and instantly became a mound of writhing green. As Bill and I tore into the disgusting, undulating pile, we had time to notice that they were all garter snakes—perfectly harmless individually, so at least there was no danger of poison. Using both hands at once, we grabbed the reptiles and slammed them against the rocks and trees. But it was a hopeless, uneven battle, and in the end, we lifted Louise—still covered with snakes—and rushed her down to the car. Crying hysterically, Jo Ann followed us.

We pitched Louise into the back seat, got in ourselves, slammed the door—and went to work. In a few seconds, the last of the nauseous creatures had been flung out into the road; Bill put the car in gear, and we heard the crunch of their squirming bodies as the wheels rolled over them.

Louise was apparently either delirious or insane. She sat staring at nothing, her muscles quivering and jerking uncontrollably. When we spoke to her and tried to calm her, she gave no sign that she understood.

Bill held the accelerator down to the floor, and we headed for Greenvale Hospital at better than 70 miles an hour. Somewhere along the road, I remember that we flashed by Martin Harley, driving an open roadster. Beside him, sat Minna Delius.

AT THE hospital, after Louise had been taken to a private ward, the doctor spoke to me about Jo Ann. "Miss Lane is suffering from hysteria," he told me. "I could put her to bed and give her a sedative—but she is young and strong, and I believe it would be better in her case, if you could keep her busy until she is too physically tired to think, or to remember. If you could take her to a dance—make her dance with you all night—"

So it was that at nine o'clock that night,

Jo Ann and I were seated across the table from each other in the crowded Marine Grill of the Scott Hotel—where, within a short while, the beauty contest was to take place. A brassy swing band was playing, the music mingling with the incessant chatter of voices. Gradually, Jo Ann's taut nerves relaxed, and she was beginning to be her normal, gay self—when Martin Harley strolled to our table and peered down at us.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

I shook my head. "Not now."

But he pulled up a chair and sat down. "I've got to. It may be important. I noticed Minna Delius out in the lobby."

"So what?"

"Maybe nothing." With a sudden change of manner, he asked, "Have you ever thought about St. Patrick—of Ireland?"

"What do you mean—*thought* about him?"

"I mean—about his driving the snakes out of Ireland. He did, you know—it's not just a fairy tale—it's a matter of historical fact. The same is true of the Pied Piper of Hamelin—even though it's a children's story, now—he really *did* lead the rats out of the town—"

I said, "Either you're crazy, or you're—"

But putting her hand on mine, Jo Ann interrupted: "Let him go on, Tom. I want to hear."

His thick-lensed eyes shifted to her. "It's true," he said. "Some people have a strange power over animals. Take another example—St. Francis of Assisi and his mastery of the birds." He leaned forward earnestly. "You, yourselves, have seen the same thing in a mild form—how some people seem to attract dogs, while others repel them. What causes that? A chemical something that one person has and another has not?"

"Possibly," I agreed, wondering where his absurd theory was going to lead.

"Well—let us suppose that it is chemical. If you or I were able to isolate that mysterious substance (probably it's a different one for each separate animal) we could also intensify it. Suppose I were to put a drop of this extract on you—something that might attract every butterfly, for instance, for miles around—"

That was as far as I let him go. I told him we had heard enough of his nonsense.

Getting up from the table, he said, "Call it nonsense if you like. And call what happened today to Jo Ann, and Dr. Exmoor, and Louise Aylesworth just coincidence. But I tell you—you haven't seen the last of it! And my theory—"

I said he could take his theory away with him.

A little before midnight, the floor was cleared for the bathing beauty contest. There was a small stage at the end of the room, where, one by one, the girls were introduced. Applause followed the introduction of each girl, after which she would step down to parade around the floor. Meanwhile, the curtain fell behind her—to rise again, revealing the next girl posing against the black velvet back drop.

WHEN perhaps ten of the girls had stepped down from the stage to join the line of the parade, the master of ceremonies announced the name of Carmelita Gomez, and Jo Ann said to me, "She's much more beautiful than any of the girls, so far. I really oughtn't to let you look."

I laughed at her. "Jealous?"

"No—just cautious."

The curtains parted—and a gasp of admiration went up from the audience. Clad in a simple white bathing suit, Carmelita was a statue come to life—each sweeping curve was the realization of a sculptor's dream—and as she slowly turned, she was the very embodiment of grace.

To the accompaniment of cheers and applause, she stepped off the platform and walked out to the stairs leading down to



the dance floor. Watching, I saw her pause as she reached the footlights—and then I saw the look of horrified disbelief that suddenly contorted her face. Her black eyes went wide with mortal terror—she opened her mouth in a vain attempt to scream.

I swung around to see what had frightened her. Pouring through the open French doors leading to the terrace, was a mass of bats that must have numbered literally millions! It was like a dense cloud of smoke blown from some dark hell of antiquity. The horde of demoniac shapes brushed low over our heads—the room was filled with the sound of their sharp twittering—and then Carmelita was covered from head to foot in a blanket of leathery wings—and it was she, alone, who was the subject of their savage attack.

I jumped up and started toward the stage, but I had taken no more than a pace or two when I heard Jo Ann cry out, and glancing around, I thought I caught a glimpse of her just disappearing through one of the windows. I turned and ran after her.

She was not on the terrace, and I thought she might have gone on toward the cliff, so I went in that direction. The cliff was deserted. With terrible apprehension in my heart, I looked over the edge at rocky shore, two hundred feet below—and thanked God that there was no sign of a broken body down there.

As I started back to the hotel, I heard a voice behind a hedge that I recognized as Harley's. "You did it," he was saying. "You did it for revenge on the girls who were prettier than you—and to old Dr. Exmoor because it hurt your pride to work for him. Isn't that so?"

A woman answered, "No! Let me go!"

"You discovered the secret in your biology work, didn't you? You discovered that you could extract something from any animal—snakes, insects, rats—something

that would attract them irresistibly. And then—"

"No! I don't know what you're talking about!"

I went around the hedge and found Harley holding Minna Delius with her arm twisted behind her back.

I asked, "What makes you think she's guilty?"

"She's guilty, all right," Harley said. "She hated those girls—and she is the only one who was able to get to them with whatever she uses to spread her damnable discovery. Probably it's a spray. Look in her bag, Tom!"

I picked her handbag off the ground. "That's mine!" she shrieked at me.

I opened it and found merely a small perfume atomizer.

"That's only perfume," she said. "Put it back and let me go."

"If that's true, you won't mind my spraying it on you."

As I squeezed the bulb, the change in the woman was almost ghastly. She seemed to collapse from sheer panic. "Let me go," she moaned. "Please let me go! They'll kill me—they'll—"

At that moment, from somewhere in the woods behind the hotel, I heard the sharp bark of a dog. Another dog bayed nearer by—and another . . .

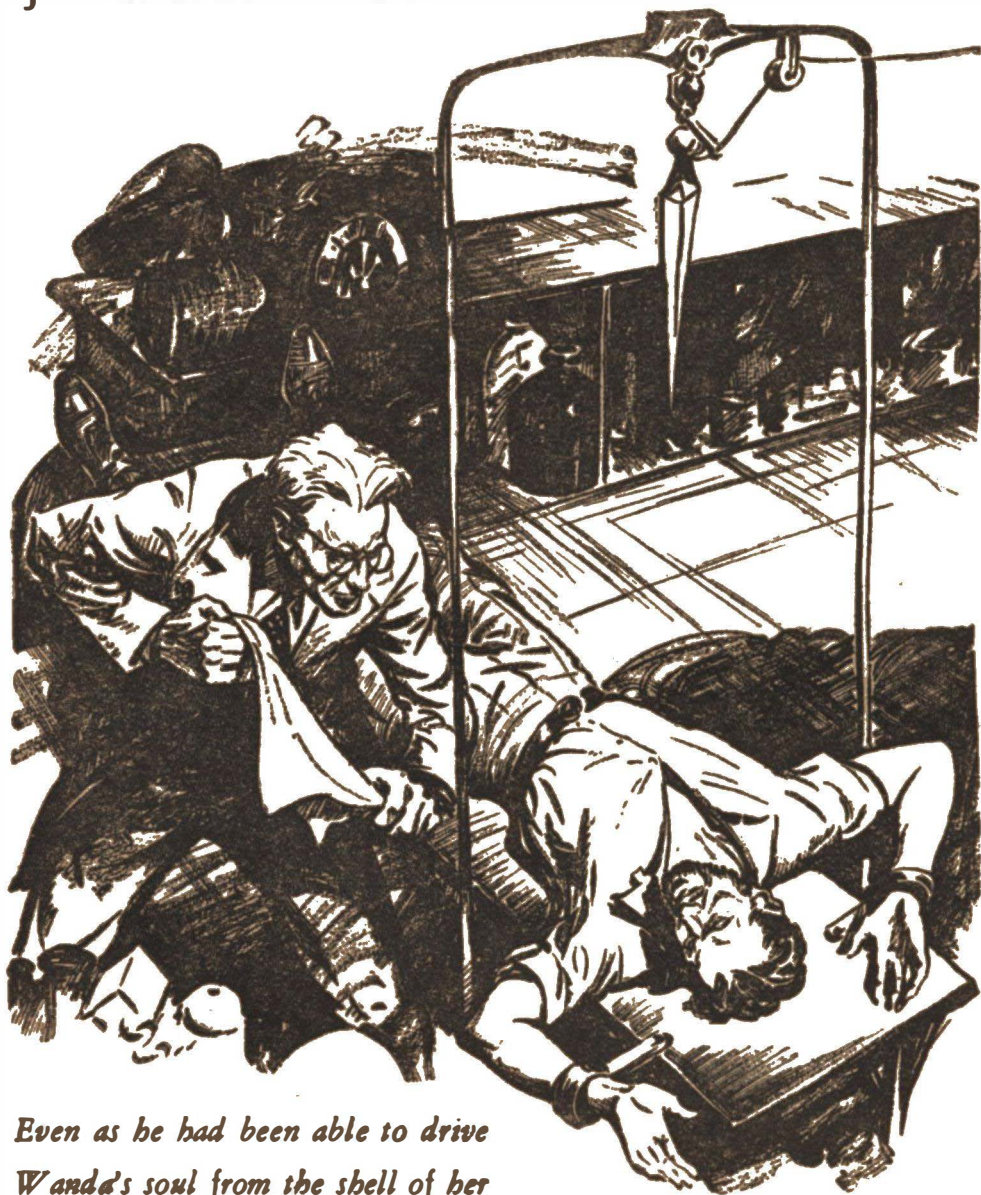
"Let her go, Harley," I said.

Minna Delius ran toward the cliff—hoping, I suppose, to scramble down to the water's edge before the pack assembled. But if that was her hope, it was a vain one. For perhaps ten minutes the night was filled with her screams. Then there was silence. I have heard how she looked when they found what was left of her—but I cannot feel sorry for her.

As for Martin Harley, whom I had so badly misjudged—he is to be my best man when Jo Ann becomes my wife. If it had not been for him, I am afraid to guess at what horror might have come to Jo Ann.

# VENGEANCE OF THE LIVING

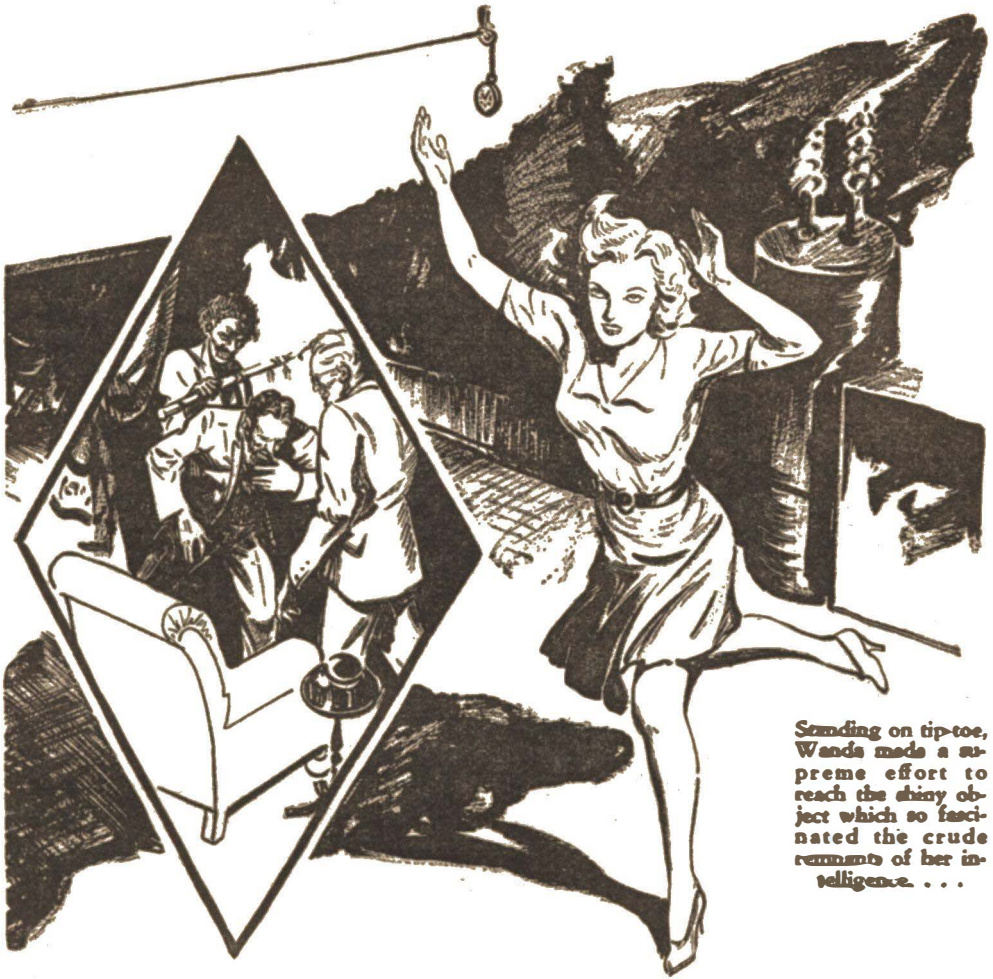
by RALSTON SHIELDS



*Even as he had been able to drive Wanda's soul from the shell of her body, so too could Dr. Beswick destroy the mortal flesh of Tom Stuart. But Dr. Beswick was a skeptic and a materialist—he had yet to learn of the inexorable justice of Karma!*

# DEAD •

*A novelette of a man who sought to destroy that which he could not understand . . .*



*Straining on tip-toe, Wanda made a supreme effort to reach the shiny object which so fascinated the crude remnants of her intelligence . . .*

**D**INNER WAS FINISHED, the blinds were drawn, and a pleasant fire crackled in the hearth of Dr. Beswick's informal but charming library. The Director of the Pardee-Fleischer Foundation for Scientific Research was seated at his large teakwood desk; he had summoned Kandru, his Negro servant, and was giving the man certain instructions. These instructions were unusual, to say the least; but the wrinkled, ape-like face of the wizened little black showed no more astonishment than might have been expected if his master had been suggesting a menu for tomor-

row's dinner. Years ago, in the African bush, Dr. Beswick had saved Kandru from almost certain death; and from that time on, the little Negro had considered himself the personal property of the white man. By some strange quirk of primitive psychology, he had simply ceased to function as a separate individual; he had attached himself to Dr. Beswick's personality as a kind of auxiliary intelligence, to be used as his master saw fit. The doctor's own right hand would no more have failed to obey the dictates of his will, than his servant Kandru.

"Twenty years ago," Beswick was say-

ing, "when we first met in your native land, Kandru, you were the most skillful of your whole tribe in the use of a blow-gun. I fancy you must have fallen off a little since then, for lack of practise; but this room is not large. Suppose you were hidden with your tube behind the draperies of the window-recess yonder—do you think you could be dead sure, absolutely positive, of hitting a man inside this library with your first dart? There must be no mistake; Stuart is a powerful devil, strong as an ox; if the first dart misses, there may be no chance to send another. . . ."

Kandru regarded his master solemnly with tiny, deep-set, ape-like eyes. "Me hit um," he grunted. During the twenty years he had spent in the United States, the man had learned to use only the most elementary English. And yet, although Dr. Beswick in addressing him never attempted to simplify his speech in the least, Kandru was never at a loss to understand; it almost seemed that he grasped Beswick's intent by a kind of thought-transference.

"Very good." In the doctor's cold gray eyes, made all the more penetrating by the heavy lenses he wore, there flickered a glint of approval; after an instant, however, this was gone. Beswick's every feature and physical characteristic seemed to indicate a nature that was chilly, uncommunicative, and implacable. He was a gaunt, slightly stooped man of about fifty, with iron-gray hair, narrow countenance and the clammy, unnaturally pallid complexion that often is associated with years of work in the unwholesome fumes and vapors of the scientific laboratory. Only one feature of the man's physiognomy belied the impression that he was utterly a creature of the intellect, emotionless as an image of stone: his mouth—his moist, loose-lipped and full-blooded mouth. Here was a clue to an aspect of his character deeply buried under his external coldness:

a hint that somewhere in the shadows of his soul lurked all the passions, hatreds and terrors of which human-kind is capable. Dr. Beswick's appearance, his manner, even his choice of words in speaking, might be those of an austere and lofty-minded scientist, a paragon of the type whom the Twentieth Century claims for its highest human product; but his wet red lips could well have belonged to one of the abominable emperors of the Roman decadence—a Negro, a Tiberius, a Caligula. . . .

"VERY good, Kandru, very good indeed. . . . But I don't want you to use one of your own African darts—do you understand that? The poison on such a dart would kill him in a few minutes; and I have other plans. Here—this afternoon, I made these, copying them exactly from your own. . . ." He handed the Negro four or five little wooden slivers, tipped at one end with sharp metal points, and tufted with lamb's wool at the other.

"They should fit your blow-gun perfectly. The only difference between my darts and yours is in the poison smeared on the tips. Instead of dying, a man pricked by one of these will merely be paralyzed; after a few minutes, he will completely recover. However, it won't take long for the two of us to tie up Dr. Stuart so he will be altogether helpless; and after that, I shall prefer that he regain complete possession of his faculties. . . ."

"Now, let's go over the whole thing, to be sure you understand what to do. Any time now, Dr. Stuart should arrive. When the bell rings, you must take these darts, and your tube, and stand in the window recess, hidden by the curtain. I'll let Stuart in myself. Probably he and I will talk for a while. Then I will go and my wife, and bring her into the room. When Stuart sees the B'wani Wanda, and realizes how she has—altered—since he

left four months ago for Tibet, he will be very angry. There will be loud words. You must watch very closely then; you must have your blow-gun ready, lifted to your lips. Presently, I will take off my glasses; that will be your signal. You must send your dart; and you must not miss. Now is that all plain? Do you understand everything?"

Kandru nodded like an effigy of stained wood and wrinkled leather. "All plain," he assented. "Kandru un'nerstand; him not miss. . . ."

Dr. Beswick continued for a long moment to hold his servant's eyes with his own gaze; at the same time, he slowly ran his tongue over his lips, moistening them. "That will be all, Kandru," he said, finally. "There is nothing more to do but wait for the door-bell to ring."

He took up a pencil, and began to write on some clean sheets of paper which lay on the desk before him. As for the Negro, now that his master had finished speaking, he sank down silently before the hearth, and sat there gazing patiently into the heart of the leaping flames.

For perhaps twenty-five minutes they remained as they were, the doctor writing calmly at his desk, and Kandru squatting immovable and expressionless on his heels in the firelight. When the door-bell jangled at last, neither of them started, or betrayed the least nervous reaction. Kandru rose silently to his feet, and with his blow-gun and the darts which the doctor had given him, took his place behind the velvet curtains of the window-recess. Dr. Beswick only ran his tongue over his lips once more, and after a moment laid down his pencil. Presently he left his chair, and passed out of the library into the adjoining entrance hall.

Two minutes later, he returned to the pleasantly fire-lit room, ushering before him a huge man, powerfully built, tall and broad at the same time—really a splendid figure, his bearded face handsome after a

bluff fashion, his deep-set and extremely blue eyes eloquent of a frank and forthright personality. Despite his full black beard, and a certain air of having experienced many things at the hands of life and fate, there was something youthful about him, a spring and zest in his movements which implied that he had yet to see his fortieth birthday.

"How very good to see you, my dear Stuart," Dr. Beswick was saying; he had assumed a manner, which, for a man of his dour habits, was almost effusive. "Believe me, I've counted the days while you were gone; I can hardly wait to hear everything from your own lips. When I recommended to our Foundation that you be given the post as leader of the Tibetan expedition, I knew you'd make a success of the undertaking. I need scarcely say that the reports that have reached us of your discoveries have more than vindicated my judgement. But you can't blame me for being eager to hear about your own personal adventures; I'm certain you have a great deal to tell. One doesn't spend two months in Nepal and Tibet without a few hair's breadth escapes. . . ."

"But do sit down, my dear fellow, and make yourself comfortable. Here, this chair by the fire! And what will you have to drink? The regular thing for you, if I recall, is Scotch and plain water—do I have it right? And—oh, yes—before you begin, perhaps I'd better call Wanda; doubtless you'll want her to be in on this. She always took such an interest in your doings, old chap, before you left for the Orient. . . ."

**T**OM STUART seated himself in the chair indicated by his host; also he accepted the glass that was proffered him. However, before bringing the liquor to his lips, he spoke. "If you don't mind, Beswick, I'd rather you didn't call Wanda just yet. I—there are a few things I'd like to tell you, before she comes."

Beswick raised his eyebrows as if in mild surprise. "You mean—you saw things which go against our Western standards of good taste, and you feel it would be embarrassing to Wanda if you spoke of them in her presence? Is that it?"

But Stuart shook his head; he was silent for a moment before answering. His honest blue eyes were troubled, as if he were turning over in his mind something he did not want to say, and yet knew he could not avoid saying. At last, however, the words came from his lips, spoken as if by another volition than his own.

"Wanda's hardly a prude or a puritan, Beswick. It isn't likely that she'd be shocked by anything I have to relate. No, it's another matter that I want to speak to you about—~~something personal—some~~ thing that should have been settled before I ever left on the Pardee-Fleischer expedition.

"You know, I learned a good many things above and beyond the scientific data I was sent for, during these past months in the mountains of Asia. Even though I was able to classify a number of plants and animals entirely new to science, and to confirm at least one important anthropological hypothesis, I don't regard those discoveries as the most important fruit of the journey.

"You know, Beswick, there are men living in the monasteries of Nepal and Tibet, who understand thoroughly certain aspects of Nature and the very existence of which is only beginning to be recognized by our Western science. I was able to win the confidence of one of these High Lamas, and he consented to teach me as much of his occult knowledge as my undeveloped intellect could absorb. At first, the things he told me struck me as so much superstitious gibberish, sheer fantasy and nothing more. . . .

"But this old lama was a man who

dealt not only in words, but in deeds likewise. Through the aid of his powers, I was able to see things, and to experience things, which are entirely beyond my skill to describe. I can only say this much: I now possess and understanding of the nature of man, spiritual and physical, which transcends anything I had dreamed of before my visit to Tibet.

"To me, it is positive knowledge, more certain than any mere theory or hypothesis, that the human animal possesses a soul; that this intelligence, this real self, whatever you want to name it, is a separate spiritual entity which merely uses the body as a tool; and that this essence of personality survives the death of the body, untarnished and unchanged to the end of eternity. . . ."

As he spoke the explorer's enthusiasm grew as if in spite of himself; he seemed to be carried away by his own words. But then he caught the glance of Dr. Beswick, which remained cold as ice, notwithstanding the warm cloak of cordiality he had chosen to draw over himself. Stuart checked himself almost abruptly.

"Sorry," he apologized. "I keep forgetting that some realities are purely personal. We have no business to ask others to take them seriously, on the mere face value of our words. What I'm really driving at is this, Beswick: the things I learned in Tibet have altered my whole scale of values, moral and ethical as well as intellectual. Whatever you may think of my reasons for this change in viewpoint, I must ask you to believe that the change itself is very real to me, very genuine. For example, it is no longer possible for me to practise a deception or a dishonesty of any sort. To a man who has looked deeply into the wonderful workings of the universe, as I have, integrity of mind and action is no longer a convenience—it somehow becomes a profound necessity."

Beswick continued to regard his guest

with an expression that revealed no more than a definite but altogether polite surprise. "But my dear fellow," he remarked, "I still don't understand. I wasn't aware that you were inclined to dishonesty of any sort, even before your visit to the Himalayas."

The troubled expression which had shown itself earlier on Stuart's bluff features, appeared again now, somewhat deepened if anything.

"But I *have* been dishonest, Beswick," he said, slowly. "Dishonest in a matter which involves you as well as myself. That's what I wanted to mention before Wanda comes into the room; I thought it would be—easier.

"I love her, you see; I'm in love with your wife. And I believe that she loves me. Wanda and I belong to each other, Beswick, inevitably and absolutely. It's one of those things that can't be mistaken; we shall belong to each other until the end of time. . . ."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Sting of Fate

**A**NXIOUSLY, Tom Stuart regarded the older man, as if trying to gauge the effect of this revelation. Beswick said nothing, however; he continued to sit there as if his visitor had just made some utterly casual remark about the weather. Stuart had no choice but to continue, amplifying and explaining his statement.

"There's no use going into the beginnings of the matter," he said, still choosing his words carefully and slowly. "When I accepted my post with the Foundation three years ago, it was inevitable that I should see Wanda from time to time, since she was your wife. Neither of us planned it deliberately; it simply happened, and there came a day when we had to face the facts. The development of the situation was not unusual; it was the old shab-

by story of firm resolves to make a clean breast of things, followed by one postponement after another.

"Not that our love was something to be ashamed of; I didn't think to then, and I still don't think so. As I said to begin with, such things are inevitable, and it is foolish to deny them. The sordid part of it was our cowardice in attempting concealment, because it was easier to avoid issues than to face them.

"Do you remember the night, four months ago, when you invited me here to dinner? Wanda and I had resolved that we would hide our love no longer; we'd tell you that evening for sure, and ask you to consent to a divorce—trusting that you would understand and forgive. But then you told me that I had been selected to lead the expedition to Tibet; and somehow—that changed everything. . . ."

At this point in his confession, Stuart's bronzed cheeks flushed dull brick red. He cast down his eyes. "It's not a very pretty thing to admit, Beswick—that sudden change in our resolution. It sounds almost as if—as if Wanda and I had feared that you would change your mind about giving me the leadership of the Tibetan party—as if we thought you small enough to allow personal affairs to influence you in such a matter. I'm afraid there isn't much I can say to defend our conduct, Beswick."

Once more, Tom Stuart lifted his eyes to meet the even gaze of the scientist. Into the huge bearded man's expression had suddenly come something almost boyish—that rare and irresistible quality of frankness and regret mingled with sheer childlike trust, which makes no extenuation of deeds committed, but appeals entirely to the understanding and kindness and forgiveness of the injured party.

He concluded: "And there it is; the whole truth as straight as I can give it to you. I—I hope it isn't too much of a

shock, old man. Believe me, I'd sooner have cut off my left hand than tell you this; but there wasn't any choice. . . ."

For a long time, Beswick sat there without saying anything, or making any sign. And when, finally, he broke his silence, the tones of his voice were entirely casual.

"Youth and youth," he murmured. "Both young, you and my wife; and I have gray hair. Who can annul the laws of Nature? But I'd better get Wanda, perhaps, Stuart, before I say any more." He rose to his feet. "You don't object, now that you've made everything plain?"

"Call her by all means." As Stuart rose likewise from his armchair, his honest countenance cleared; he was openly relieved to see that the other had taken his bombshell so calmly. "Then we can discuss the situation from every angle, and decide what is to be done. It was only—only while I was breaking the news to you, old chap, that I somehow felt—it would be easier, without her . . ."

AS HE left the room, Dr. Beswick actually smiled. It was a rather horrible smile that hovered on his incongruously red lips; a smile full of craft and cruelty and malice; but Stuart, caught up in his own thoughts, did not notice. The huge man felt his heart pounding in his chest; in one moment more, he would see *her*—the dearest thing in the world to him, the treasure of his dreams, Wanda. . . . And at the same time, he cautioned himself that he must consider Beswick's feelings; after all, in the man's own house—even if everything *did* seem to be straightened out now. . . . Somehow, he must restrain himself from taking her in his arms; he must be content with holding her cool hand in his own, and letting his love speak only from his eyes. Later—somehow, in some way—things would be worked out so that they could be together without restraint; but for the present, he must hold himself in check.

And then, presently, Wanda Beswick entered the library; she stood there, tall and slender and heart-breakingly lovely. She was one of those waxen-white women with skin textured like flower-petals unfolded in some distant tropical rain-forest. A coil of gleaming black hair rested on the nape of her slender neck; this, and her perfectly-formed scarlet lips contrasted strikingly with her pallid complexion. She was gowned in a sheath of dull silver brocade, designed to enhance the grace of her lithe body, at once fully rounded and delicately slender.

For Tom Stuart, when Wanda came into his field of vision, every resolve, every admonition he had given himself, was swept away in a flood of emotion. For four long months, this woman's loveliness had been burning in his thoughts; and now that he was face to face with her, he was like one suddenly intoxicated by a potent and irresistible drug. Dr. Beswick, whose feelings Stuart had intended to respect, had come into the room with his wife; but the tall, bearded man was suddenly oblivious of his presence; there was room for only one thought in his brain. . . .

He strode past Beswick to Wanda's side; he gathered her in his arms, and held her close to him. For a long time, he stood thus motionless, breathing the perfume of her wonderful hair. But then he slowly held her away from him at arm's length, as if to feast his eyes on her loveliness. "My darling," he whispered. "How I have dreamed of you! It seems so long! Tell me, did you get my letters? I had several chances to write, you know; I sent you long letters."

She did not answer his question; but Stuart at first supposed that she was so overcome with emotion that she was unable to speak. It was only after a moment that he realized that something was wrong.

The look in her eyes was the thing which first made a little chill of nameless



fear quiver along his spine. Somehow, her eyes were different; there was no physical change, they were dark and liquid as always, fringed with long delicate lashes: but they no longer reflected anything—they no longer spoke to him. . . . Wanda's eyes were *empty*: that was it; they were vacant as the eyes of an idiot, from whose living body the soul has fled—or a small baby, in whom the soul has not yet been awakened.

Very quietly and gently, Stuart repeated his question. "Wanda; my letters . . . did any of them reach you?"

She did not reply; only her lips slackened a little; from one corner of her exquisite mouth trickled a glistening rivulet of saliva. It was hardly noticeable; and yet there was something infinitely horrible about the sight: a perfectly gowned and lovely woman, in the very flower of maturity, *drooling*—actually slobbering like a small, helpless infant. . . .

**S**UDDENLY, a spasm of frantic energy coursed through Stuart's giant frame. He shook Wanda violently, as if to stir up in her awariness something that escaped him; at the same time, he fairly roared, "Wanda! Answer me, I tell you! Speak, Wanda—for God's sake, speak to me!"

Now, at last, enough impression seemed to be made on Wanda's brain to elicit a response from her; but her reaction was almost more shocking than a continuation of her apathy would have been.

Whimpering, she pulled away from Stuart. "No," she whined, in the voice of a resentful little girl. "*Don't* shake Wanda! Nasty man with black beard leave Wanda alone. Wanda won't play. . . ."

Slowly, Stuart's arms sank down, and hung limply at his sides. His brief outburst had subsided utterly; now he was a man stunned, utterly nonplussed; the only emotion in his eyes was pain, mingled with complete bewilderment.

"Wanda," he muttered. "What's wrong? What's happened to you?"

Slowly, he turned his massive head in the direction of Beswick, who stood by, peering with a dreadful bird-like intentness through his heavy glasses. Stuart's bewildered eyes focussed as if with an effort on the older man; when he spoke, it was still almost plaintively, in the voice of a man confronted with something beyond his understanding.

"Is something wrong with her, Beswick?" he asked. "Something's happened—while I was gone?"

Beswick slowly nodded. "Quite correct, Stuart. Something has happened. And there's something very decidedly wrong with her—at least from your point of view." He spoke deliberately, as if each word were a morsel of food, to be savored by his tongue and his moist red lips, tasted and relished with all the voluptuous enjoyment of the *gourmet*.

But then, suddenly, his manner changed. "You fool," he resped, his speech acid now as if tinctured by an inexhaustible well of bitterness in his soul. "What did you take me for, during the past year, when you were making love to my wife? Did you suppose I was a blindman, or an utter imbecile? Did you imagine I wasn't aware of what was going on between you and Wanda? It wasn't difficult, you know, once I'd noticed you mooning at each other with love-sick eyes, to arrange things so you'd suppose you were alone together—while I watched from a place of concealment.

"And just now, when you decided at last to flaunt your deception in my face, you did so in the expectation that I would meekly bow to the inevitable, and step out of the picture—a quiet little divorce—you and Wanda would set up house-keeping together—and you'd even invite me to dinner once in a while, just to prove that we were all civilized, and no hard feelings. . . . I know all your argu-

ments, Stuart, all the arguments you and Wanda accepted as self-evident, along with the rest of your sophisticated, enlightened generation. She married me when she was a mere girl, too young to know her own mind, dazzled by my wealth and position; but then True Love comes along, and of course she can't be expected to go on living with a man old enough to be her father. . . . Oh, I know the whole rationalization as well as you do yourself. But the point is, it doesn't impress me!

"Why should I be cast aside like an old and worn-out garment that has outlived its usefulness? I can assure you I'm not so old that I fail to appreciate Wanda's loveliness. And I refuse to be cheated out of a thing that belongs to me, for all the notions you and your kind take so readily for granted—self-sacrifice, and unselfishness, and doing the decent thing, and all the rest of it.

"No, no, my friend; you don't get rid of me so easily. I made up my mind to that, the very same night I confirmed my suspicions about you and Wanda; and it didn't take me long to decide on a plan of action.

"**YOU** might be interested to learn that the idea of the Pardee-Fleischer Tibetan expedition originated with me. It took a little time to convince our directors that such a thing should be undertaken; but once I had done that, it was very simple to obtain the leadership of the venture for you. Tibet is a long way from the United States; and I wanted to feel that you were safely disposed of for a certain length of time.

"That gave me an opportunity, you see, to deal with the case of my lovely but slightly tarnished partner in marriage. The—treatments I had decided upon as appropriate in her case necessitated a definite period of weeks; and I did not want to be disturbed by any embarrassing

inquiries, such as you would have made, concerning her whereabouts."

While Beswick was speaking, Tom Stuart's expression reflected a strange gamut of emotion; pained bewilderment gave place to sheer horror, until he stared at the older man as if he were confronted by a loathsome and venomous reptile, an adder, a cobra, instead of a human being.

"You?" he said thickly, speaking as if his throat were half-paralyzed. "You—did this—to Wanda . . . ?"

Deliberately Beswick went through his horrible mannerism of moistening his lips with his tongue; even the bitterness he had for a time been unable to conceal was replaced now by a dreadful complacency at the thought of his own cleverness. "It was a most interesting experiment," he purred. "To transform an alert and intelligent adult woman into a mental defective, somewhat between a high-grade idiot and a very retarded imbecile. Certain drugs, mescal and cocaine derivatives, administered secretly in her food, made it easier; but the real work was done by radiations of extremely short frequency, which I focused upon her while she slept. The rays leave no external trace; Wanda's friends are greatly shocked to learn that she is suffering from a mental derangement; but no one is suspicious of foul play—these psychotic states are so little understood, you know; it might be hereditary as well as not.

"I was under the impression that my treatments had actually destroyed Wanda's intelligence, once and for all; but it may be, Stuart, that your interesting discoveries, which you brought back from the High Lama in Tibet, indicate another hypothesis." Beswick's tone, at this point, sharpened itself with an odious edge of sarcasm. "Perhaps Wanda's soul, to use your romantic term, was not destroyed at all by my radiations, but merely driven out of her body, leaving her with only the reflexive powers of speech and action that

reside in the lower centers of the brain. That possibility worries me very little, however; I'm not interested in her soul; it can float about in the spaces of the universe till doomsday, for all I care.

"No, my friend, the condition and location of Wanda's soul does not interest me, to be utterly frank with you. As she is now, Wanda needs very little care; she's like a small child, quite happy so long as she is given something to play with, something she can do with her hands, like cutting out paper dolls or digging in a sand pile. And her beauty, as you notice, remains quite unimpaired. An ideal arrangement, my dear Stuart—I flatter myself that I was very clever to think of it."

While he had listened to these taunts, Stuart's face had gone first dull red, and then it had paled to a startling blank whiteness. His shoulders raised themselves slightly; he clenched fists like two powerful hammers, at the same time thrusting his massive bearded head forward. He took a step toward Beswick. "You unspeakable swine! Do you think you can get away with this—and live? By God, I'll . . . I'll tear you apart with my bare hands . . ."

The menacing advance of the huge bearded man was in truth something to quail at; a wild animal, enraged to the point of madness, a gorilla or a tiger, would scarcely have been more ominous.

The gaunt, stooped, gray-haired scientist, however, remained perfectly calm. He casually removed his strong eyeglasses, as if to rest his eyes for a moment . . . . .

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Murder Machine

**I**NSTANTLY, a small tufted missile sped across the room from the closed draperies of the window opposite the fire-

place. It was true to its mark: its sharp needle-point pricked the flesh of Tom Stuart's neck, just between his collar and the line of his hair. Kandru had carried out his instructions with precision . . . .

Stuart was not even aware of the slight prick made by the tiny dart in his neck, so intent was he upon the fulfillment of his towering anger. The first intimation that came to him was a curious feeling of stiffness. He wanted to lunge forward, to seize Beswick with his hooked fingers, to throttle the life from him. But, somehow, his limbs would not obey his will; he felt an involuntary tension of the muscles over his whole body.

And then, as the drug Dr. Stuart had smeared on the dart took full effect, Stuart was no longer even able to stand erect. He remained fully conscious; but he pitched helplessly forward, like a stone effigy off balance. He began to make an outcry; but his very organs of speech were paralyzed; nothing came from his lips but a horrible dry croaking, inarticulate and meaningless.

And then, for all the world like some dark and evil spider that has remained in concealment until a strategic moment, the Negro servant, Kandru, scuttled forth from the red velvet curtains across the room. He joined Dr. Beswick, who was already kneeling beside the helpless form of Stuart with a coil of rope which he had taken from his desk. Together, master and servant bound the drugged man, with knots and loops that were cruelly tight; even Stuart's immense strength, when he regained consciousness, would avail him nothing against these bonds. While they made him captive, he continued to watch with open eyes—eyes that were like uncovered pits through which could be seen a hell of horror, baffled rage, and sickening apprehension.

As all this took place, Wanda continued to stand there; but she had lost all interest in the man whom once she had loved. She

was playing a childish game with her fingers, twining and intertwining them with a certain clumsy solemnity. However, when Kandru and Beswick began to move the helpless giant from the room, Wanda followed behind them.

Down a long corridor went that strange procession; then they shoved and pulled Stuart into a large, white-tiled room, equipped with the gleaming apparatus of a scientific laboratory. With great effort, they heaved him on a white-enamelled stand supported on rubber wheels—a piece of furniture similar to an operating table such as might be found in a hospital. The table was equipped with metal clamps; Dr. Beswick proceeded to fasten these about Stuart's massive body, so that he was held immovably in place.

While Kandru watched with the inscrutable visage of a man scarcely removed from a jungle savage, and Wanda with her habitual imbecile fixity of feature, Dr. Beswick proceeded with his design. He wheeled the enamelled stand across the room, and adjusted it in place beneath a curious mechanism—a tall iron frame shaped like an inverted U. From the cross-bar at the top of the uprights, dangled a long, glittering and very heavy blade of steel, its needle-point directly above the heart of the huge man who lay helpless on the operating table. This grim sword was attached to a trigger device, evidently intended to let it fall at a jerk upon a cord which depended from a ceiling pulley, a few feet to one side. In effect, Dr. Beswick's mechanism was a slight variant of the classic instrument of execution as used in France since the days of the Terror—a guillotine, which differed from the original only in that its victim would be skewered through the heart, instead of decapitated . . . .

IT BECAME evident, now, that the doctor's precaution in shackling and binding his victim had been far from

groundless. Though he could still not speak, the effect of the paralyzing drug was beginning to wear away from Stuart's body. His tremendous muscles swelled and strained, and his great body heaved with fierce effort.

However, it was of no avail; he could scarcely stir.

Deliberately, his red lips curved in a cruel smile, Dr. Beswick toyed with the trigger cord of his abominable machine. "Can you hear me, old chap?" he murmured to Stuart. "I think you can—my drug contained nothing to impair the hearing. I'd like you to understand the full beauty of the vengeance I'm about to take upon you, before it is consummated.

"I, at least, have the virtue of frankness, you observe. I don't pretend to be any better than I am. I know that the emotion of revenge is not a very laudable one; but it so happens that I feel vindictive, and I intend to indulge myself. Frankly, I hate you, Stuart. I envy you for your youth, and your strength, and your virile good looks. And I loathe and detest you because my wife preferred you to myself. For a whole lifetime, I have conducted myself as a reputable and constructive member of society. I have contributed to scientific progress; I have earned the respect, and even the admiration, of the whole world. But now, at last, I intend to enjoy myself. I shall satisfy every murderous impulse that civilization tends to suppress in us. I shall be cruel and merciless, not only with considerable enthusiasm—but with all the finesse of a subtle mind.

"Let me remove even the slight satisfaction you may feel, in supposing that I will be detected and be punished for that which is about to happen to you. Obviously, neither Kandru nor Wanda will give me away. And even in the event that someone knew you were coming to my house this evening, Stuart, even in the unlikely event that suspicion should be

(Continued on page 100)

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# TERROR TALES

(Continued from page 98)

awakened against me—it will be impossible for anything whatever to be proved against me. I have the means, in this laboratory, of chemically destroying every trace of your body and clothing; and you may be sure that I shall perform the process completely and carefully.

"But I begin to share the suspense you must be feeling, my dear fellow. Let us, as the vernacular saying has it, get down to brass tacks!" Smiling in hideous enjoyment of his own miserable joke, Beswick indicated the blade suspended over Stuart's heart. "I have no literal brass tacks to stick in your flesh, to be sure; but perhaps this little device of mine will substitute.

"No, no—don't cringe and turn pale, just yet, Stuart. You must save a little emotion; because you don't quite yet know the full extent of my subtlety. I had intended to do the obvious thing, I will admit; to kill you simply and directly with my own hands. But then I had the inspiration which led me to construct all this elaborate equipment.

"I shall not kill you myself; instead, Wanda shall do the deed. It will not be difficult to persuade her to pull the cord, and release the suspended knife. Her mentality is hardly suggestible, I will admit; but she happens to find bright objects irresistibly attractive. This is a common tendency for idiots and small children, as you doubtless know. My watch, for example . . ." He removed his large, sparkling silver watch from his pocket, and dangled it on its chain before Wanda's gaze. Instantly, her features were animated with a kind of childish desire; she reached out eagerly to take the shining object in her fingers.

**B**UT Dr. Beswick lifted it high, keeping it just beyond her reach, and yet still in plain view, so that she continued to

regard it with simple-minded interest. "You see, Stuart," he continued, "how easy it will be to make Wanda play the role of your executioner. I have only to tie my watch-chain to the trigger-cord of my little apparatus; and she will grab the watch in a twinkling. The sword will drop, and you will be skewered like an insect in a collector's frame . . . . Now, frankly, my friend, looking at the situation quite impersonally, doesn't my scheme have a charming irony? You injure me by attempting to steal my wife; and I get my revenge by watching her slaughter you with her own lovely hands . . . . I flatter myself for the idea; I really do."

Very gently, Dr. Beswick restrained Wanda, while he fastened his watch to the dangling trip-cord. "Be patient, my dear," he murmured. "You may play with the pretty watch in a moment; you may play with it to your heart's content . . . .!"

While Beswick was occupied, Tom Stuart at last began to regain the use of his vocal chords. Speaking in a voice that came with difficulty, yet still managed to convey sheer desperation, he addressed himself neither to Wanda nor Beswick—but rather to the Negro servant, who still remained in the room.

"Kandru," he whispered. "Kandru—you must prevent this. do you understand? He's mad—you're master is mad, crazy, out of his mind. Get help; call the police; do something, for God's sake. You—can't let this—happen . . . ."

Kandru might have been a sinister wooden sculpture, for all the response he showed to this plea; it was obvious that no hope lay in that direction. While his master continued to live, he would have ears for the voice of none other. Unless commanded by Beswick, he would take no part in the grisly drama, but neither would he dream of hindering or questioning his will.

Beswick himself, however, chose to notice Stuart's desperate supplication. "You

consider me insane—a madman, a lunatic? Quite the contrary, my dear fellow; I assure you that I'm fully responsible for my actions. If I believed in your theories about the survival of the soul, it might even deter me from my course—because I'm quite convinced that I should be condemned to everlasting punishment. Certainly I should deserve it. But I fear I must remain a confirmed materialist, until I'm presented with some tangible proof of the reality of supernatural values; and so I mean to proceed without further interruption . . . ."

"Now, Wanda, you can reach for the pretty watch, if you like. See—it's swinging back and forth on the long string. Isn't it lovely and shiny? Do you think you can grab it with your fingers, Wanda?"

As she saw the watch dangling on the trigger-cord, Wanda's expression of interest brightened. Tentatively, she stretched forth her lovely arm to seize it. With diabolical cunning, Beswick had tied it at such a height that she could barely touch it, while standing on tip-toe. She tried, but she could not quite grasp it.

**S**HE would have continued her efforts; but Stuart, in his extremity, managed to regain full use of his vocal organs. He suddenly shrieked at her, "Wanda! No, for God's sake! Don't let him make you do this, Wanda! It's Tom, Wanda. Tom Stuart; Tom, who loves you!"

Stuart's voice was fraught with desperation, not so much from physical fear as from the pure horror of watching the woman he loved about to commit this senseless and grisly butchery—but when Wanda recoiled from the watch at his words, it was only the sheer harsh volume of the outcry that caused her reaction. Plainly, she was utterly insensible to the pleading of the man she had once adored; she was nothing more than a small child shrinking away from a loud noise which it does not understand.

A shade of annoyance crossed Beswick's pallid countenance. "You've frightened her," he snapped. "Well, there's a way to prevent that . . . ." And he busied himself for a moment to find a strip of cloth in a nearby cabinet. With this, he approached Stuart, intending to gag him, and prevent any further outcry.

However, as he bent over his victim, Stuart's blue eyes caught his own with a glance that made him pause in spite of himself. And when the huge man began to speak once more, Beswick could not avoid attending to his words. They were uttered in a low, even tone, free now from any trace of the wild hysteria which a moment past had frightened Wanda. It seemed that Stuart, by a huge and abrupt effort of the will, had in the space of a few seconds conquered all fear, and had resigned himself to his fate.

"Beswick," he said, "you've won this round of the game. There's nothing on earth I can do to prevent you from committing this murder. You can torment and mutilate my body; but the real me won't be changed—any more than you could change or injure the real self of Wanda, with your abominable drugs and radiations. You drove her soul out of the shell of her body, as you will presently drive out mine; that her flesh continues to live, as a mere automaton, whereas mine will be killed outright, makes no difference at all. Presently our two souls will be joined in the consummation they were never able to find in this world. I shall find Wanda, and we shall be as one for all eternity, in the world of spirits. I shall have only one duty, Beswick—one duty which I must fulfill, when I am released from my body, before I can fly to my soul's desire . . . ."

"According to the laws of Karma, which regulate the course of every atom and every spirit in the universe, I must punish you for your misdeeds. I must follow you down the endless corridors of eternity, until at last you are trapped and

helpless. I who am your victim now, must in the end play the role of executioner. There is no escape for you, Beswick; no hope—in all the shadows of eternal night, no hope. No hope . . . ."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Fulfillment of Karma

NOW, for the first time, the ghoulis ecstasy of hate in the heart of the scientist was shot through with a tremor of fear. Somehow, these calm words of the man he was about to murder, carried such a note of conviction, of utter and fatal certainty, that even Beswick's ingrained materialism was shaken. He could not repress an outward reaction to this qualm that disturbed his inward orgy of malice; and this reaction, strangely enough, was a flare of sudden and violent rage.

An ugly snarl contorting his full lips, Dr. Beswick gagged his helpless victim cruelly, so he could not utter a further sound. And not content with this violence, he struck the face of the huge man savagely with his hand.

"Liar," he hissed. "Liar, and fool! Suppose you did *live* on as a ghost or a spirit—why should I be afraid of a mere puff of wind, conscious or not? You wouldn't have any body; what could you do to injure me?"

"But even that is impossible. There's nothing on the other side of death. *Nothing, do you hear?* Blackness, oblivion, nothingness! You're going out like a light; your body will rot in a tank of acid; and that will be your finish, for ever and ever! Do you hear that, Stuart! For ever and ever . . . ."

Beswick was so absorbed in his own words, as he hurled these taunts at Stuart, that he failed to notice the actions of Wanda. She had forgotten her fright of a few moments past, and was renewing

(Continued on page 104)



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Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount	Auto Accidental Death Amount	Travel Accidental Death Amount
1-40	\$1000.00	\$2000.00	\$3000.00
41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
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(Continued from page 102)

her interest in the bright dangling watch. Standing on tip-toe, she made a supreme effort to reach the shiny object which so fascinated her crude remnants of intelligence. At last she was able to clasp it between the very tips of her slender fingers; and with a little sigh of satisfaction, she pulled it down towards her.

There was a click of the trigger mechanism, and the heavy sword hurtled downward. Beswick was leaning close to Stuart as he spoke, and the evil weapon barely missed his head as it buried itself in the huge man's chest. As it was, a leaping fountain of warm blood spattered the face and clothes of the scientist, before he could draw away . . . .

After he had recovered from his shock of surprise, Beswick's main feeling was one of angry disappointment, which only increased the black rage already aroused in him by Stuart's threatening words. In a sense, he had fulfilled his long-cherished plan of revenge; things had gone exactly as he had intended; Wanda, with her own hand, had killed her former lover. And yet Beswick was not satisfied. There had been no time to gloat over the agony of the man he hated—indeed, Stuart's expression in death, as he lay there transfixed and bleeding, showed no agony at all, but rather a profound and entire peace. Somehow, the gaunt, gray-haired scientist had pictured the consummation of his plot in different colors; he felt cheated.

However, seeing that Tom Stuart was at last beyond his power, he wasted no time in carrying his scheme through to the end. With Kandru's help, he prepared a great vat of corrosive chemicals; and then he began to dismember the inert and mutilated body on the operating table. One grisly chunk of flesh after another he dropped into the fuming, seething hell-broth.

Finally, after he had removed every

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30x4-40-20	22	1.98	1.00	30x4-40-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-40-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-40-19	22	1.98	1.00	30x4-40-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-40-19	3.45	1.45
30x4-38-20	20	1.98	1.00	30x4-38-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-38-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-38-19	20	1.98	1.00	30x4-38-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-38-19	3.45	1.45
30x4-36-20	18	1.98	1.00	30x4-36-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-36-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-36-19	18	1.98	1.00	30x4-36-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-36-19	3.45	1.45
30x4-34-20	16	1.98	1.00	30x4-34-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-34-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-34-19	16	1.98	1.00	30x4-34-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-34-19	3.45	1.45
30x4-32-20	14	1.98	1.00	30x4-32-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-32-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-32-19	14	1.98	1.00	30x4-32-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-32-19	3.45	1.45
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30x4-8-19	0	1.98	1.00	30x4-8-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-8-19	3.45	1.45
30x4-6-20	0	1.98	1.00	30x4-6-20	2.98	1.50	30x4-6-20	3.45	1.45
30x4-6-19	0	1.98	1.00	30x4-6-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-6-19	3.45	1.45
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30x4-2-19	0	1.98	1.00	30x4-2-19	2.98	1.50	30x4-2-19	3.45	1.45
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trace of blood on the laboratory floor and furniture, he turned to his Negro servant. "All right, Kandru. You can go to your quarters now. I shan't need you any more tonight. We'll empty the tank of acid in the morning . . . ."

WHEN Kandru had passed silently to his quarters in an adjoining room, Beswick took Wanda by the hand, and led her out of the ghastly laboratory by another door.

"The fool," Beswick muttered. "Did he think I would ever let him take you from me, Wanda? You're mine, my white lovely Wanda; you belong to me alone, and nothing will ever make me let you go. . . ."

He led her into the adjoining bedroom, and made her lie down on the brocade covers of the wide bed. She followed quite docile and willing; plainly she was tired and sleepy, after all the excitement of the evening, and was only too glad to be put to bed. Beswick watched her long lashes close over her liquid dark eyes; her breathing grew deep and slow; soon she was lost in sweet and innocent slumber.

He told himself that, everything considered, it had been a most satisfactory evening—at least it seemed so now, in retrospect. Quickly he had commenced to scrub away some blood-stains that remained under his finger-nails—when he caught a sound that made him pause and wheel abruptly away from the wash-stand. The dry little tune choked to silence in his throat. He could have sworn that he was not mistaken: a voice, a man's voice, had spoken his name. It had sounded from behind him, from the bedroom—not loud, but clear and distinct.

With a single stride, Beswick was at the door, peering into the softly lighted chamber. It was quite empty; there was no one present except Wanda, who still lay quietly on the bed. There was no possible place of concealment for anyone else; he had been mistaken then, after all . . . .

Almost angrily, as he returned to the wash-basin, Beswick told himself not to be a fool. There was nothing to get jumpy and nervous about; it was absurd to imagine things like that voice, sounding from nowhere. At this rate, he would soon be as bad as that fool Stuart, with his talk of Oriental mysteries, of ghosts and spirits floating around without any bodies . . . . Nevertheless, Dr. Beswick did not resume his humming, as he went on with the task of cleaning his hands. -

He had removed the last trace of blood, and was wiping his fingers on a towel, when he heard his name spoken once again.

"Beswick!" It sounded, distinctly and evenly, in deep-throated masculine accents; and this time, he knew there could be no possible error. It was very close, too; as if the speaker stood framed in the door between the bathroom and the bedroom.

On the previous occasion, Beswick had whirled in sudden alarm; but now he felt a chill of fear that almost paralyzed him. Slowly, slowly, he forced himself to turn in the direction of the voice, hardly daring to guess what he would find confronting him in the doorway.

WHEN he saw that it was only Wanda, his relief was almost overwhelming in its intensity. It was so great, indeed,



that he forgot for an instant to wonder how his wife had been able to leave the bed and approach him so silently behind his back; and also he forgot the fact that his name had been spoken in a man's voice, rather than a woman's.

But Beswick's respite from terror was only momentary. As Wanda stood there before him, superbly beautiful in her long white silken robe, he realized that in some subtle and indefinable way, she had changed. She kept her right hand behind her back, as though it held something she wished to conceal. And in her eyes, the vacant look had given place to an expression of insight, of sheer intelligence, that was almost more than human.

Beswick checked himself from almost automatically ordering his wife back to bed, as if she were a disobedient child; the strong sense that she had undergone some weird psychic metamorphosis, kindled again the embers of his fear until the flames of panic leaped dangerously. He could not have told why; but he felt a strange impulse to flee, to escape at all costs from the level gaze of those dark eyes; and almost without conscious volition, he began to sidle toward the other door of the bathroom—the one that led to the gleaming scientific laboratory.

But then, Wanda's lips parted; and the sound of spoken words came from her throat. "It's no use, Beswick. You can't escape. It won't do you any good to run away. . . ."

As he heard these syllables, Beswick's heart seemed transformed to cold stone in his body; the paralysis of his terror became complete, and he was rooted to the spot where he stood. It was not so much the meaning he got from the grim phrases that terrified him, as the actual tones that pronounced them.

There was no doubt whatever that the voice he heard, issued from Wanda's soft, feminine lips; and yet it was most certainly not a woman's voice. It was the

unmistakable utterance of a man, a powerful man, virile, deep-chested and forceful. . . .

The increasing realization that froze Dr. Beswick's soul prevented him, for the time being, from moving a limb; but he did manage to speak a few syllables in a dry, croaking and almost toneless voice.

"Stuart. . . You told—the truth. *You have come back—from the dead. . . .*"

"Correct, at the very first guess, Beswick." The effect of that stern baritone coming from Wanda's body might conceivably have been ridiculous under other circumstances. As things were, the very grotesqueness of the phenomenon, its shocking and profoundly unnatural quality, added the final touch of horror to a situation already fraught with soul-shaking implications.

**T**OM STUART'S voice continued: "Already you are reaping the harvest sown by your abominable deeds. . . . Do you remember your taunt, that you made only a short time ago, Beswick? While you spoke, I was already separating my consciousness from the body you were about to destroy—an ability I acquired in the remote mountains of Tibet. But I heard you distinctly, nevertheless. These were your words: *'Suppose you did live on, as a ghost or a spirit—why should I be afraid of a mere puff of wind, conscious or not? You wouldn't have any body; what could you do to injure me. . . . ?'*

"You were quite correct, Beswick, in a certain limited sense; my disembodied spirit could not affect you in any way, so long as you remained in the flesh. But you failed to realize one thing, in your conceited scientific ignorance. There, at hand, ready and waiting, was a sound physical body; the flesh and blood which once belonged to Wanda; the earthly vehicle through which I am speaking and acting at the present moment. You are

## Vengeance of the Living Dead

a connoisseur of ironies, Beswick, so permit me to point out this one for your delectation.

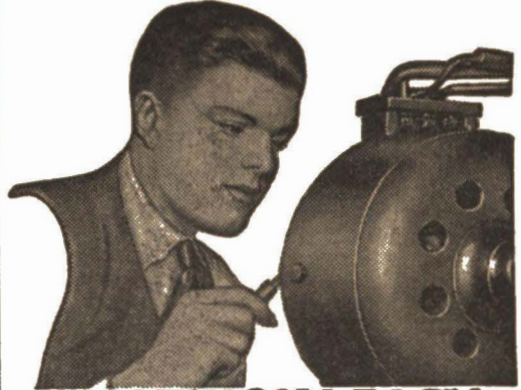
"It was your own abominable treatment with drugs and electric rays that drove Wanda's soul out of her body, leaving it a mere empty shell without a guiding intelligence. I had only to wait until the right moment to take possession of its untenanted brain and nervous system. For the time being it is my body, the body of Tom Stuart, to be used in obedience to my will. And now, James Beswick, it becomes my duty, in fulfillment of the inscrutable laws of Karma, to punish you for your ghastly and deliberate crimes . . ."

Slowly, as Tom Stuart's voice spoke those grim words, Wanda Beswick's slender arm came into view, the hand grasping an object that until now had remained in concealment behind her back. It was a heavy silver candlestick, one of a pair that graced the dressing table in the bedroom: a formidable bludgeon, with its long shank and leaded base.

"It becomes my duty," the voice of Stuart intoned, "to shatter and destroy the house of flesh in which lurks your miserable soul. Your unclean spirit shall be driven forth from its earthly refuge, to be seized as it deserves by the owl-eyed demons of the Nether World. . ."

The sight of the heavy candlestick, raised slowly and menacingly before his eyes, had the effect of breaking at least partially the paralysis of terror which had gripped Beswick. Whining in a perfectly inarticulate excess of fear, slobbering and wheezing, he began to inch backward, through the open door that gave entrance to the laboratory.

Inexorably, Wanda's beautiful white-robed body, animated by the spirit of Tom Stuart, advanced upon him; slow and deliberate as the movement of Fate itself, and equally relentless.



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AND so, inch by inch, foot by foot, James Beswick was forced backward into his laboratory. Half-way across the room he retreated, unable to do more than shuffle spasmodically, as if he were struggling against some horrible unseen magnetism that controlled him against his will.

At last, however, gathering all his resources of energy into a single titanic effort, he managed to break the spell; his semi-paralyzed muscles were abruptly galvanized into action, and he wheeled in his tracks as if to burst from the room in a mad dash for freedom.

He did not see the great porcelain vat of acid directly behind him—the devil's cauldron in which he had earlier dissolved the tormented body of Stuart, piece by piece. The rim of the tank caught him directly at the back of the knee-joint; and he lost his balance. Perceiving in a flash what had happened, he tried frantically to save himself; but the impetus of his panic was too great . . .

As he toppled into the vat, he screamed once—a dreadful, rasping, piercing wail—the utterance of a soul already trapped in the murky pit of eternal damnation and agony.

The seething chemical splashed and closed over his writhing body. Once, for a brief moment, he stretched forth a hand, the fingers already blackened and charred as if by searing flames. But then the frantically gesturing limb was gone again; and no trace remained of James Montague Beswick save an oily scum which gathered slowly on the bubbling surface of the acid . . .

A few moments later, the Negro servant, Kandru, burst through the door. He had heard the dying scream of his master, and had rushed from his room to see what was wrong. The sight which confronted him, in the mercilessly clear light that flooded the white-walled, glittering lab-

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oratory, was sufficiently awesome to strike even his primitive, insensate intelligence with wonder and terror.

Slender, gardenia-pale, flawlessly beautiful, Wanda Beswick was deliberately stepping into the fuming tank of acid in the middle of the floor, as if it were nothing more than a pool of clear water.

Where her flesh came in contact with the chemical, it was visibly seared and disintegrated; and yet she showed no sign of pain whatever. Her eyes caught the murky eyes of the Negro, even as she sank slowly into the corrosive liquid. And then Kandru heard the solemn tones of a man's voice, which strangely seemed to come from the slender body of the disappearing woman.

"A judgment has been performed," the voice said, "and a tragedy concerning three human souls has ended. When this outworn shell of flesh is consumed and disintegrated, two of those souls will find each other, and they will be joined together for all eternity in the bliss and utter fulfillment of love. The third has already found the reward which he earned for himself by his actions.

"As for you, Black Man, you have sinned; and yet you are not entirely to blame; you are dominated by an intelligence more subtle than your own. Before you lies the remainder of this life, and all the eternity of mortal re-births, recurring

until you reach the stage of full responsibility for your own actions. Let the fate of your master, who has been swallowed up by the darkness without dawn, be your warning, that you may profit by the lessons of experience. Heed these words, Black Man—the words of one who has passed through the flames of human suffering and already beholds the cool radiance of truth . . ."

As he heard this solemn pronouncement—even though the literal meaning of the syllables was beyond his comprehension—Kandru felt a strange emotion of wonder and the profoundest awe. Many years ago, as a small child, he had strayed into the gloomy and eternal shadows of the rain-forest in his native Africa, and he had felt something of this same soul-stirring intimation: a sense of dark mystery, of unseen eyes regarding him from the fathomless shadows—a sense, above all, of his own weakness and insignificance and lack of understanding.

His reaction now, as it had been then, was almost automatic; the response of his race for untold generations to the presence of the Unknown. Uttering something between a wail and a ritual chant, Kandru sank to his knees, and grovelled forward on the tiled floor. His arms outstretched, fingers groping and tense, he bowed down again and again before the Universal Mystery.

THE END



# • • BLACK CHAPEL • •

**I**N THE past many readers wrote in asking us just what sort of people our authors were. There was a sound basis for all the uncertainty, for at one time it was very profitable for writers to set themselves up as a race apart, grow a lot of hair, wear purple cravats and live in attics—all this on the supposition that it would add to the interest in their work. Well, perhaps it did, but gradually people became more realistic and began to ask editors questions as embarrassing as these: "How can Percy Deersfield Steele live in a city attic and pretend to know anything about the Florida swamps? Why should I read stories by someone who doesn't know what he is writing about?" The public began to demand the truth—and it got it! Such questions forced writers out into the open, and those who couldn't withstand the hard knocks of reality failed to survive.

Wayne Robbins, whose eerie stories have appeared in many past issues, has told us that he is an "ordinary guy" of twenty-six who worked at everything from trimming windows in city department stores to toiling with a survey crew across the mountains of Denver, and who finally decided that putting into words the things that he had seen was the way he wanted to earn his living.

Russell Gray, one of the most prolific, and best known writers of mystery-terror stories, tells us that he drove a truck in his youth and graduated to the police-morgue detail of a daily newspaper.

Our writers speak of their wives and children and hobbies, and we see that there is nothing strange about them; that they are people exactly like others but for the fact that they have chosen to work at writing stories for the entertainment of others—and for the checks involved.

But an element of mystery still remains after all the hocus-pocus has been cleared

up. Letters have been piling up on our desk from readers who want to know where our authors get their ideas for stories and how they go about writing them. We've asked our writers to inform us on these points, and the answer to both questions seems to be: hard work. But Ralston Shields, whose story *THE VENGEANCE OF THE LIVING DEAD* appears on page 88 of this issue, can tell you much better than we can. Go ahead, Ralston!

My mode of life is at once a hindrance and an invaluable source of inspiration for a writer of yarns dealing with the bizarre and mysterious.

I am very much affected by places; my chief pleasure in life is to go off to some lonely region, and spend days wandering about, absorbing local color, observing the lives of the few people I run across, and above all trying to expose myself to that intangible yet extremely potent quality known as *atmosphere*.

Now, obviously, a man who is unable to stay put in one comfortable corner, will find himself struggling against the routine necessary to produce a steady flow of writing. I'm no exception, I fear; there are mornings when I have to use a mental sledge-hammer in order to make myself sit down at my typewriter, and face the terrifying blankness of a clean piece of paper, . . .

So much for the disadvantages of being a rolling stone, and a writer at the same time. It's more interesting to speak of the advantages.

It seems to me that in order to be effective, a yarn must have an exciting plot, living characters, and must be written with clarity and force. Yet these elements are not sufficient; a story must have the same quality that I mentioned three paragraphs back as giving life to a real landscape: I mean the quality of atmosphere.

Nearly all my stories have grown out of some feeling that I experienced in a particular place. For example, I



## BLACK CHAPEL

was standing on a granite headland of the northern California coast, one bleak autumn day. The ocean reflected the gray of storm-clouds driving in the sky; along the landward horizon, black trees seemed to make threatening gestures against Heaven as they were lashed by the wind. It seemed to me that ghostly presences, unseen but very much alive, had been awakened all around me; I felt the touch of invisible hands in the spattering of rain-drops, and heard the screaming of elemental demons in the voices of the storm. I experienced the emotions of a very small and lonely human being surrounded by the hidden forces of the universe. And those emotions proved to be the groundwork of a story which was later published in this magazine; by setting my characters against the background of that bleak coast, I tried to give my readers a taste of the same chill and thrill I had known there in real life.

Another scene, very different but quite as effective in its own way, is still filed

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## TERROR TALES

away in my memory for future use.

I was staying in a small town on the desert in Northern Mexico. I had been warned not to wander too far away from the scenes of habitation, because only recently a half-crazy robber had burrowed through the adobe wall of the hut that served as the local jail—and was known to be lurking somewhere in the vicinity. I disregarded the admonition, however; I had only a limited time to spend in Lerdo, and I was fascinated by the weird character of the landscape. I had no intention of remaining cooped up in the town, until the somewhat casual representatives of law and order in those parts had got their man. . . .

As things turned out, I did encounter the fugitive in question, on one of my rambles. But I was in no danger from the meeting; the poor wretch had died of thirst and privation. Already, several *sopiletes*, the great scavenger buzzards of Mexico, had been attracted to the cadaver; and pouring like brown streams over the shrunken limbs were hordes of biting ants.

I shall never forget that scene. I had gazed upon other corpses before that time; it was not the mere presence of Death that affected me so powerfully. Again, it was that potent factor of *atmosphere*: the eternal ranges of sallow hills spreading fanwise to the horizon, the intense blue of the desert sky, and above all the utter silence—against which I could hear the beating of my own heart, and the whispering wing-feathers of the clinging vultures.

# Classified Advertising

(Continued)

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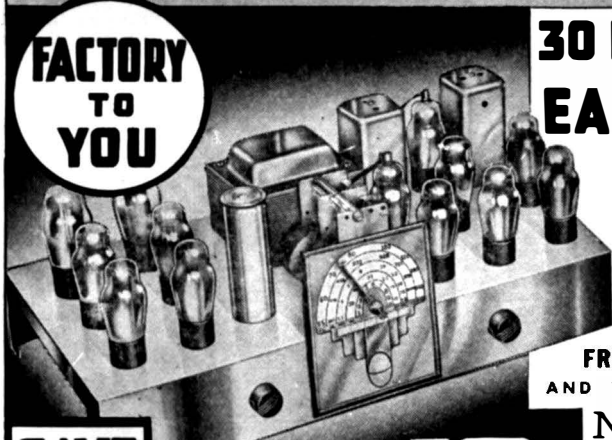
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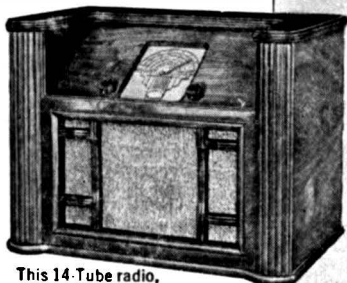
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