

Weird Tales



MARCH, 1945

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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A Sip With Satan

By **ROGER S.
VREELAND**



Heading by **A. R. TILBURNE**

THERE were times when our little home was the loveliest spot on earth. A sweet ramshackle homestead off a dirt road, away from town, and no close neighbors except old Everett Marlowe. Delia and I thought it was about perfect.

We had been there only a year. As for Marlowe, we didn't mind him. His property

was next to ours, but his house, a four-story freak of stone block, was hidden—all but the slate roof—behind a thick wall of hemlock. Poor old Marlowe, we used to think. Just one old man alone in a place big enough for a hotel. During that first year the only times we ever saw him was when he pattered about in his garden of herbs.

I repeat, *there were times* when our home

A strange-looking garden . . . some of the plants were ordinary; but others were, well, just plain queer!

was lovely. But there were times when it was not. Not that Delia and I didn't get along. Nothing like that. We were in love. No, there was something else that at unpredictable intervals shadowed our life there. I wish I could explain it.

All I can say is this: The atmosphere would become heavy. Our spirits would sink. We would lie awake nights; become nervous. A heavy silence would fall over the place. If only a cricket would chirp; if only some water would drip, a mouse scratch.

Delia would whisper: "There is something surrounding us! What is it, George?"

I felt it, too, but it was six months before I admitted it.

These periods lasted two or three days, not to recur in as many weeks. At first I tried to think it was just the New England weather, but—well, there was no use pretending it didn't bother me. Between times, however, we forgot about it, and the dreary periods seemed like dull dreams.

We had moved there in October, when the place was bathed in a mellow glory on a rise that received the sun almost all the day. The oaks then were nearly bare, and the maples were golden. We had many fruit trees and berry bushes, but oddly there were no apples—save a few branches that hung over from Marlowe's property. No apple trees—that was all that I then had against the place.

HERE it was October again, and that apple tree of Marlowe's was loaded with the most delicious McIntoshes you could ever sink your teeth in. And my neighbor let those ruddy, sweet apples drop to the ground and rot!

This was what led to my first meeting with Everett Marlowe, for I was aggressive enough to go right over and tell him that if he didn't want those apples, I did.

I had to sort of weed him out of his garden of herbs. It was a strange-looking garden, and meticulously cared for. Some plants were plain, some exotic, others exceedingly queer. Marlowe was on his knees in the midst of yard-high bushes, plucking odd little turquoise berries into a tin cup. He didn't hear me at first. I had to shout. When he did look up, instead of being

startled he merely smiled and said, "Hello, George."

Since I had never seen him before (one could never forget his face) for a moment I was set back. His appearance was definitely unpleasant, but his provincial drawl was friendly.

"Why shore, take 'em," he said. "I cain't eat 'em. Only got three tooth!"

The truth of this was conspicuous. It might be added that they were large and protruding. This first meeting was brief. I liked the old fellow, and I didn't. There was something repelling about him, not just that he was dirty and homely, but he had a manner that made me want to run and hide.

As for the apples, I gathered them all, and in the next few days my wife did up some applesauce. She suggested it would be nice to give him a few quarts. I hadn't told her of his negative effect upon me; didn't want to upset her. I took the jars over, knocked on his back door, and he opened it quickly. A cold musty draft hit me. He took the applesauce and thanked me with minimum ceremony.

Reciprocation was not what I expected, but Marlowe proved he had some neighborly spirit. I'll never forget the night he appeared at our kitchen door with a bulging brown bag in his hand. After inviting him in I was placed in extreme embarrassment by Delia, who was doing up the supper dishes.

This was the first time she had seen him at close range. She dropped a plate, put her hands to her face and uttered a shuddering cry. But I suppose it was natural for her to be startled, for his parched old face, uncouth beard and hair, those three teeth, and his gray lightless eyes composed a frightening sight.

But Marlowe took no notice. "It's good applesauce," he said. "I already et some."

He paused, fumbled with the bag.

"You're the first'ns to show me kindness in many years," he went on awkwardly. "Here's a l'l present for yuh," and he held forth the bag to Delia.

"It's herbs," he mumbled. "I grow 'em. Put 'em in a pot with some water and boil 'em. Makes good tea. Heh, heh, heh!" His voice was cracky under a forced laugh.

I thanked him and he left abruptly. I

threw the bag on a high shelf in the pantry and forgot about it.

NOW that we had lived here awhile, Delia and I began to cultivate friendships in the town, about a mile down the road. We joined the church and grew friendly with the minister and his wife. Delia joined the Ladies Aid, I the Men's Club. It was the old-fashioned kind of life we had always wanted.

Still, the cloud hung over. We never mentioned those awful spells to anyone. In fact it was a long time before we ever got around to even speaking of Everett Marlowe.

One thing in our relations with the townsfolk, however, we could not understand. None of them would ever come to visit us. There was always an excuse for us to go to their homes.

Thanksgiving passed. So did Christmas. We saw practically nothing of Marlowe—just his form, briefly, now and then, about his house. *But we could feel him.*

Then, on the night of January 29, there was a windy storm. I remember the date well. A fine sleet was glazing everything, and the wind was bending trees and snapping branches. Delia and I sat close to our hearth fire and close to each other, reading, looking up now and then as a dead limb crashed to the ground. The fine icy particles grittied against the windows, and at intervals volumes of them slapped at the panes furiously.

Delia arose several times to look out. Then, peering through the parted curtains, she said: "George, I saw someone swinging a lantern." I joined her and looked out to where the roadway wound up the hill toward the front of the house. I could see a few nearby trunks against the whitened ground, and a fine outline of the tree tops, but nothing else. Delia insisted, nevertheless, that she had seen a light.

We made an attempt to resume our reading, although we were both too nervous to concentrate. About ten minutes passed. Then, at a sound, we both jumped. It was barely audible, at first, but it unkeyed us. A knocking at the door!

Why should we be frightened by a mere knocking? It will be remembered that visi-

tors were unknown to us. Besides that we were so tense that anything could frighten us.

It was a very feeble knocking, unrhythmic, like someone patting the door with a soft glove. I went quickly to the door, swung it open. There stood Everett Marlowe. The first thing I saw in the darkness was his three protruding teeth. But there was something very uncertain about him.

Delia uttered a short and high-pitched "Oh!" Then for a prolonged moment Marlowe and I faced each other in silence, while cold and sleet blew into the house. Common courtesy deserted me. The natural thing was for me to invite him in, yet I didn't want to.

Marlowe wavered. The brim of his hat concealed his eyes. He was covered with glistening sleet. Then in his thin cracked voice he said: "Can I come in?" He sounded pathetic, and I felt like a coward. At this point I began inwardly to recant. He was indeed gaunt and frightening in appearance, but I wondered if perhaps we had not been fools to think such weird things of him.

"Yes—come in," I said, and I closed the door behind his shuffling steps. Delia stood back, shaking. Marlowe stumbled to a chair and fell into it.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Marlowe?" I asked as steadily as possible.

He slouched forward and held his hands over his face.

"Make me some . . . tea, kindly," he muttered. "You still got some of my herbs, ain't yuh?"

"Yes, but what has brought you here?"

"Piece of tree blew down . . . hit me on head. Quick, fix some tea, you must . . . quick . . ." He groaned.

DELIA was still shaking, but she went to the kitchen and put on the kettle. I looked at Marlowe more closely now. His head and right shoulder were covered with chips of bark. His forehead was bruised. Then, as his head sank lower over his knees, I saw blood trickling down the back of his neck. He kept on muttering: "Quick . . . quick . . . just bring me my herbs . . . a cup . . . hot water . . . hurry . . . it's the only thing to save me. . ."

He was, I now realized, hurt badly. First aid rather than herb tea was my first

thought, so I called to Delia to get cotton and bandages, a basin, and to bring me the water as soon as it was hot.

"No! No!" he cried weakly. "Bring me my herbs first!"

His tea was prepared.

"Let me hold your hand, Delia, will yuh?" he murmured. "It's been so long—so long since a gentle hand has touched mine!"

She took his hand. Marlowe held it, squeezed it gradually—his bony, dirty hand enveloped the small soft one of Delia's. Then he picked up his cup of foolish tea and put it to his lips. Resentment had risen by bounds within me, but I couldn't speak or move. Whether the storm suddenly became quiet, or whether I just ceased hearing, I don't know. But, that dread silence and that indescribable feeling of depression was smothering me.

Marlowe sipped slowly, and closed his eyes. It must have been five minutes before he drained the cup—and he was very quiet. Finally the cup dropped from his fingers, fell to his lap, and the dregs dripped to the floor. As though someone were opening a door again to the outer world, the sound of the storm grew once more in my ears. Again the night howled.

Words can no longer serve to relate my feeling. O God, what a time! What an unholy event! The Prince of Darkness was presiding over my house, and I was alone. Complete terror possessed me during those few minutes. But I struggled to find my voice.

"Marlowe!" I yelled.

His face was the color of ashes. Marlowe was dead! I didn't merely suppose so. I knew it. He was dead. That in itself wasn't so bad. He was nothing to me. He was dead in my house—I could forget that.

But my wife! The look that came into her eyes shattered what was left of my nerves. She arose stiffly, looked at me with eyes I had never seen before, reached for the bag of herbs, calmly stepped across the room and walked out into the night. I was speechless.

First I glanced at the corpse of Everett Marlowe, then at the door Delia had closed behind her. All about me was haunting emptiness. Then with a surge of panic I ran

for my lantern. I couldn't find it at first. When I did, my hand shook so that it was several moments before I could get it lighted. Without hat or coat, and with my lantern swinging at my side I ran out to find Delia. There were her footsteps in the snow, leading toward the road. I followed the best I could, while my hoarse cries in the storm seemed to die at their source, meek and futile. Straight down the road toward town they led, but the wind and falling snow was rapidly voiding them. Soon they were invisible, but I kept on until I came to the cluster of buildings comprising the town. All lights were out. But I got up Sheriff Mawson. We had been somewhat friendly. I guess he thought I was crazy. There wasn't much he could do then, but he made the effort.

The confusion, the storm, and my emotional state had made the night such a weird fantasy that I hardly remember what happened. I know that when the gray skies re-lightened I was simply obeying orders in an organized search for Delia. The snow had stopped, but the cold and the wind persisted. Removal of Marlowe's body had been managed without me. Although I was asked a lot of questions, apparently they were satisfied for the present that I was not involved in anything of a criminal nature.

Delia's disappearance, however, ended in a strange sequence to the already perplexing series of events. Word came that she had been found at an outlying farmhouse coincident with the disappearance there of the farmer's wife—a Mrs. Newcomb. Object of the search was then transferred to Mrs. Newcomb, and Delia, in a highly nervous state, was returned home. With her came Sheriff Mawson, the county physician and a handful of other tawdry, badge-breasted busy-bodies.

Delia was exhausted and dazed, although—so far as I could tell—entirely rational. I insisted that she be put to bed before further questioning. I made her some tea. Sight of the cup as I held it toward her brought a low cry from her lips. "Now I remember!" she whispered. "Mr. Marlowe was drinking his tea!"

"Of course, dear, but what happened after that? Why did you go out?"

"Go out?" She gazed at me searchingly.

Her eyes swept briefly the other faces in the room. "Go out?—I don't remember. I don't remember a thing after Mr. Marlowe drank his . . . his stuff, and held my hand."

WILBUR FISHER was an undertaker in the next community. Mrs. Newcomb was reported found by Mrs. Fisher in the living room of the latter's home when she had returned from a visit about 11 o'clock at night. Now Mr. Fisher was missing. The routine was established. The undertaker was discovered the following night at the home of a neighbor. An 18-year-old lad from that home was next on the missing list.

This went on for several days. Never was there an inkling as to who the next victim would be nor whence he would vanish. At first no serious harm befell any of these amnesia-like unfortunates. Then—one week after Marlowe's death and Delia's disappearance—the Reverend Cubberly was gone.

There were some particular details I had observed in connection with each disappearance, and I wondered if anyone else had noticed them. After much thought I decided to keep these observations to myself, and to follow them through in complete privacy. I didn't even tell Delia except in a very general way.

Resolving to visit the empty house of Everett Marlowe, I chose the next morning to do so. Sauntering from my back yard, past the apple trees, through a jungle of bare briars, and under the hemlocks, I came into the shadow of the big forlorn house. It was forbidding enough in summer, with a background of foliage to soften it. But now it stood mean and stark.

As I paced apprehensively through old Marlowe's herb garden, the overhang of the thick slate roof moved over me as though to crush me out. The black windows gave no evidence of what was within. The very walls of the house, lined with cracks and brown creepers of ivy, frowned down at me. I paused curiously over herb brush bearing winter berries, and noticed green leaves under protective balls of glass.

Mounting the back stoop, I was surprised that the old boards didn't crumple

with my weight. The stoop itself sagged away from the stone of the main structure, and warped wooden embellishment hung loose from the eaves. The door was massive enough for the main portal of a fine house. It pushed open easily.

The odor of the place was at once sickening. Mustiness, sour plaster, and stale food mingled with other smells. A short corridor led to the kitchen, apparently the room Marlowe had lived in, for it contained a cot with a pile of dirty blankets, a table with unwashed dishes, food leftover, a wood-cooking stove, stack of kindling, pots and utensils, and in a dark corner a sink and handpump. The house had been built for elegant living of its day, but decadency had ruled for many years.

I moved slowly through other rooms on the first floor. They were mostly bare. A few pieces of old dusty furniture stood here and there. Probably Marlowe had chopped up the original furnishings for his stove. Little by little, I imagined, he had stripped the house of things which must have been beautiful and costly. Outlines on the walls showed where paintings had hung, where massive pieces of furniture had stood. All the rooms were gloomy, considering it was a bright morning, until I came to a wide and handsome drawing room. Here light flooded through an immense bay window, onto a sprawling array of plants—more herbs—growing in flower pots and boxes. The floor was a mess from where he had watered them and spilled earth.

Even though I had had no association with the place, no reason for sentiment, something choked me as I went up the grand stairway. It was this desolate emptiness all around in a place that had been built for gaiety, where the warmth of human sociality once had pulsed so strong, and now was a mausoleum for dead memories. Statuary, porcelain, glass and iron ornaments—cold symbols of a past—stood about to haunt the silence. They alone survived, I suppose, because Marlowe couldn't burn them in his kitchen stove. Everett Marlowe—miserable wretch—scion of a proud family—what curse had left him to survive alone in these ruins?

Through the rooms of the second floor and the third floor I moved. They were

just empty rooms—only bits of evidence were here and there of the luxuries they had once known. Now that I was in the house it seemed even higher than I realized. And there was yet a fourth floor. As I approached this, up less impressive stairs, the first floor and kitchen seemed remote indeed.

Reaching a semi-circular landing I faced a fanlike arrangements of closed doors. Nearing the end of my inspection, disappointment was growing because I hadn't found what I specifically sought. Beginning at the left, I opened the doors methodically. There were small rooms, probably for servants. But upon opening the last door I faced surprise.

This room, much larger than the other, was completely furnished and had been much used. A glance and I knew that this was what I had been looking for. There were the untidy signs of work always a step ahead of orderliness. The floor was carpeted, there were comfortable chairs; shelves lined with books filled one wall, and a great cabinet containing hundreds of bottles occupied the other side. The central piece of furniture, however, was an old-fashioned rolltop desk. It was open, and on it stood an oil lamp and a brown book.

This, specifically the book, was what I hoped I might find. I picked it up, and the brown of its aged covering came off powdery in my hands. The pages were dark and brittle. It had been exactly bound, and every word in it was hand inscribed. Then I looked at the titles on the shelves, read the labels on the bottles. All confirmed what I anticipated.

I DEPARTED then, with the book under my arm. When I got home Delia was at the door, and her white face was enough to warn me that something was especially wrong.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Don't speak yet."

I carried the book to my room, locked it in my dresser. I washed my hands. When I returned my wife was standing in the living room, her hand to her forehead.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Mr. Cubberly is dead."

My stomach sank. "Tell me," I urged.

"He was found lying on the kitchen floor—strangled."

"Great heavens!" I choked. "Well, at least we'll get state—perhaps federal authorities in here now. He was dead when they found him?"

Delia nodded.

"Anyone missing now?"

Again she nodded. "Mrs. Cubberly!"

At this stage I decided to get Delia away from all this. I went to town, telegraphed my brother in the city, waited for reply, and put my wife on the next train. She hadn't needed much coaxing to go, though she wanted me to go with her. I promised to join her in a few days.

The murder brought a small crowd of newspapermen and detectives to the community. Evading them, I went home, got the book, and delved into a subject unfit for any mortal to read. I destroyed the book, finally, but I cannot destroy my memory. What hideous mind of the past concocted it, whence he obtained his information, I had no way of knowing, but of the latter I can surmise. It was difficult at first to attack reality to the carefully penned, carefully preserved scripts. The language was old, the spelling obsolete, and there were phrases in Latin, German, and Greek. Though I hurried through some portions, my attention pursued one idea, one train of thought, and the clue I sought slowly unraveled itself.

A new enigma surprised the community the next day when Mrs. Cubberly, the minister's wife, failed to return; and equal surprise when no report came of another disappearance. Although Mrs. Cubberly remained vanished, new disappearances ceased. Gradually the town began to breathe more easily.

Delia wanted to return, but I insisted that she remain away until spring. I was convinced that the evil spirit hovering over us had not departed permanently, that one day before summer we would awake to a new shock.

The winter lingered. I was not only lonesome but extremely ill at ease. I subscribed to a city newspaper, however, and began a little hobby. It was to collect certain small items I discovered I could find in the paper every few days. They came from various

parts of the country, didn't rate much importance in the city paper—which used them chiefly as fillers.

These were notes of human disappearances, in most cases attributed to amnesia, such as are seen frequently in any paper. Particular items I filed separately. Now I discovered that if a line were drawn on a map through the places from which they were date-lined, a definite geographic contour would result.

Early in May the line pointed directly our way, though still hundreds of miles distant. I grew excited. Later the towns became closer together and much nearer. And for the first time the papers carried a general story on a series of amnesia cases, at the same time recalling the events of months earlier in our community.

ONE moonlight night my vigil at the Marlowe mansion was rewarded. I saw something move near the corner of the house. I tried to stop breathing as I saw the figure of a small man move out into the moonlight. I jammed my pipe into my pocket and crouched into the deepest shadow possible.

As well as I knew that Everett Marlowe had died and been buried, I knew also that *this* man was Everett Marlowe. He passed very close to me. He stopped now and then to look around, as though spotting familiar things. I was afraid he would see me. Finally he moved toward one of those glass bells under which he grew strange plants. He lifted the glass and felt some berries. Then he kneeled before the plant and spent four or five minutes picking the berries and dropping them into an envelope. He went through the same procedure at several other bushes, then went into the house.

I saw light flickering through the windows. I knew what he was doing. I knew he was preparing his herbs. I waited, then walked to the door.

"Come out, Everett Marlowe!" I called.

I heard uncertain steps shuffling and gritting on the boards. In a moment the man appeared in the doorway. He didn't look quite like the Marlowe I knew. I didn't see those three teeth. The face wasn't so withered. But—those same lightless eyes!

"Who are you?" came a dull voice.

"You should know *me*," I replied.

He came slowly toward me. *He did know me.* "Get out of here, George!" he said menacingly.

"You'll not drink your brew tonight," I said audaciously. "Marlowe, you will die tonight. You have come to the end of your unnatural roamings, spreading misery and death."

"You know too much." He didn't speak with that colloquial drawl of former times. Clumsily, but steadily, he continued coming toward me.

"Is your tea ready yet?" I asked. "Not that I care to partake of your hospitality!" How he took me so off guard is beyond me. But he made a lurch—his fist struck my temple, and I fell to the ground dazed. When I tried to get up he hit me again. In a few moments he had me bound, dragged me into his kitchen. He tied me to a chair, carefully not too secure and he allowed my arms free. Then with some concern he put a wet cloth to my face and forced whiskey down my throat. All this was through no pity for me. When he was sure I was all right, and that I was secure, he went back to his work.

Small heaps of dried leaves and berries were spread over the table. A pan of water was heating. He became very occupied, but every few minutes glanced toward me nervously. After studying his little piles at great length, making corrections, carefully sorting out little pieces, he dumped them into a large bag, added some powders, and shook the bag vigorously. Then he withdrew some and dropped it into the boiling water.

I was thoroughly frightened. I knew what he intended to do with me, and that if he succeeded I would be dead at the end of another 24 hours. Finally he spoke: "Why do you call me Marlowe?" he asked. "Do I look like the man you knew?"

"No. But you succeeded well in finding a man who resembled your former self. And as you planned to return here, you thought it might help in case anyone saw you. Is that right? Well, I'll give you credit for a fair job at makeup."

"You really have been nebbing into my affairs, haven't you!" he growled. "And I suppose you know what's going to happen to you—now?"

"I know what you would *like*—the same as happened to my wife. Or I might better say, as happened to Mr. Cubberly. You took no chances with him, did you. . . ."

"Ha!" he grimaced. "So you know about him, too! And do you think you can stop me now?"

"You are already stopped—and don't know it!" I blurted out in an angry bluff.

"No-o-o-o!" he cried in muffled but confident tone. A scowl crossed his face—a scowl of demoniac triumph, of wicked exultation. "I shall never die! I have but begun to live. While now I must live but from day to day, my mind and spirit as one, leaping from one human to another, as a man leaping precariously across a stream from one stepping stone to the next, soon I will have perfected a way to extend the effect of each . . . ha! . . . you know about that, too? Well, soon I will not live only from one night to the next, but until the next full moon reaches its zenith.

"Ah!" he went on. "The ways of Satan are subtle. The longer you serve Him the more confidence He places in you, the more of His secrets He divulges."

"So it was Satan," I said, egging him on, "Who gave you that evil book that was in your fourth-floor study?"

Marlowe turned toward me fiercely. Deep in his dull lifeless eyes I saw waxing a lurid glow. "What do you know of a book of mine?" he demanded in savage guttural.

"Much!" I returned. "I have the book—I have read it from cover to cover—and when you're dead, I shall burn it page by page!"

"Where is it!" he demanded, fury and fear mingled.

"Where neither you nor anyone else shall ever find it."

His fingers worked as if in anticipation of reaching for my throat. "I would kill you now—if I didn't need you. . . ."

"Yes, I understand."

He turned, disgustedly. Impatiently he removed the pan from the stove and began pouring the contents in a glass. This was my deadline for action. Desperately I reached into my pockets. The best I could find was my pipe. Hurling it at him, I knocked the glass to the floor. Then with sudden and great effort I pushed myself

forward and tried to stand. Wood in the chair snapped. I was on my feet, but the broken chair was still tied to me. Marlowe rushed toward me. I wheeled about timing it so that he fell against the chair, and the force nearly knocked me down, too. Grabbing the first thing I saw—a shovel leaning against the wall—and without taking time to aim, I swung it around. The flat of it caught Marlowe against the head. He staggered, dropped to his elbow, giving me a vital moment to disentangle myself from the broken chair.

Without wasting time I repeated the tactics he had used earlier on me. I searched for something secure. A vertical pipe ran through the room close to the wall. I tied him to this, using what pieces of cord I could find, and strips which I tore from his shirt. After he was secure I threw out the remainder of the baneful brew.

The hour I judged was about 10:30—which meant one-and-a-half hours until the ominous moment of midnight. Marlowe's senses returned shortly. For a while he was sullen. Then he tried to break loose—without success.

But he moaned and he writhed, and twisted his face. With strange words and incantations he petitioned the Devil. The air trembled with the unholy imprecations that spilled from his mouth. He blasphemed the Devil until he choked for breath; then he blasphemed God. The last time I looked at him his face was black and his tongue protruding, swollen and green.

Finally he was silent for a few seconds. Then in a rasping, though more rational voice—but uncompromising—he begged: "George! my tea . . . git it to me or I'll loose every curse upon you I have ever learned! *George!*"

I backed away, raised my arm to hide my face. Marlowe shrieked an unspellable word—then lapsed into a continued wail that rose and fell with a chill more penetrating than that of a mourning hound. Marlowe had gone mad.

The room was murky with a greenish vapor. The yellow light from Marlowe's lamp was all but stuffed out. What evil forces were contending I could not know. But of this I was sure: I was alone in an existence dominated by another dimension.

It must have been within a very few minutes of midnight. Marlowe shrieked like a tormented loon. I felt my own sanity being put to the test. The house from its foundations vibrated as if to the discord of great organ pipes of the deepest pitch.

I could stand it no longer. I ran out into the open. The moonlight and lighter air were a relief for a moment. I looked up to the moon—in time to see it blotted out by a sudden dense cloud. Darkness engulfed me, everything—everything except the house. I turned toward that awful edifice of evil—whence the weird screaming of Marlowe came unabated. A green aura was giving off from the building, the same sickening hue I had seen inside. It palpitated slowly, like the pulse of some gruesome organism.

Suddenly there was a rushing of wind, accompanied by a thousand tiny singing voices, like a conglomeration of sharps and flats plucked from the highest strings of a harp. With it came a shrouding blackness, sweeping toward the house from all sides as though bursting in to fill a void. Before it was merely dark. But this was the blackness of chaos. It even snuffed out the green luminosity of the house. And for a moment I lost all sense of feeling.

Marlowe's screaming stopped abruptly.

I ALONE knew that the curse of our community now was lifted; that Everett Marlowe never really had died until this moment. I alone knew that there was a man in there, where I left Marlowe, slowly returning to consciousness, who soon would wonder where he was, what had happened to him.

And I alone knew the ancient sorcerer's secret that Marlowe had invoked through the wicked concoction of his brew of herbs, the nocuous recipe and its sinister consequences—its drug potency that could permeate the very seat of life to separate the metaphysical threads that bind body and soul. Only I knew that this elixir could thus, at the culmination of its alchemical power, literally free spirit from body; that the liquid a moment after being consumed could empower the drinker, through his mere touching of another person, to transfer his spirit to the other body where it could overpower and subdue the victim spirit. And

I had learned, of course, that this was why Marlowe had wanted to hold my wife's hand while he drank the tea that awful night.

Yes, I had learned *so much* since that night!

Now—as I stood before the invisible house—the air screamed all about me, there was a quality reminiscent of that night. So, I waited—and waited—the only mortal aware of the forces that had been battling hereabout the natural order of things.

True, there was a catch to Marlowe's evil trick—one that he had sought to overcome. The power of one draft of his brew was limited until the next sun-at-nadir. If after sundown the parasite spirit did not transfer to another body, he was doomed to die at midnight.

Had Marlowe ever availed himself of his power previous to the time he was forced to—so desperately—when he borrowed the body of my wife? That is unanswerable. But since then I now had the evidence that he had gotten his unnatural existence down to a good system.

But now, awaiting the end of the sinister demonstration the blackness and suspense continued.

Heaven and hell may have been contending for this spot of earth. I might not live to see the light of another day. But no—it all ended very suddenly. The moon broke forth again, and the air turned clean and fresh, and the bigness of the house once more loomed before me. For a moment I couldn't move. It seemed as though I had to wait for my blood to recommence its circulation.

Determined, and at the same time timid, I went back into the house. I felt along the damp walls of the hallway until I reached the open door to the kitchen. A great square of moonlight beamed through a window, onto the place where I had left the man who had been the temporary Everett Marlowe.

The form was heaped over, but it stirred. "Are you all right?" I asked.

A mild groan.

I freed him and he tottered uncertainly. "Where am I?" he queried dazedly.

Whoever he was, he would find out, but never *why!*

