

TERROR TALES



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Number Two

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TWO LONG NOVELS OF DEMONIC MENACE AND CHILLING HORROR

Queens of Beauty and Horror.....George Edson 6
What had happened to those lovely dancing girls who had vanished so silently, leaving their men behind them—ruthlessly murdered? What monster of evil could have created the satanic orgies which ended so horribly?

Bride of the Serpents.....J. O. Quinliven 34
I struggled blindly in the relentless grip of the deadly quicksands—while the girl I loved was a helpless victim in the hands of the mad sculptor! Could I do nothing to save her from the hell of frightfulness that lay before her?

THREE SOUL-SHAKING NOVELETTES OF GHASTLY TERROR

Mistress of Satan's Hounds.....Frederick C. Davis 52
Once before a lovely woman had fallen before the savage fangs and fendish desires of that hellborn pack—and the whole county still shuddered at the thought of the monstrosity she bore. Now, Jeff and Laura could hear their ominous, lusting calls coming closer. . . .

Pleasure Cruise To Hell.....Donald Graham 78
The yacht rolled heavily in the path of the approaching hurricane, and the only shelter in sight was the home of unfathomable evil—Madman's Isle! Fear raged through their hearts like a roaring sword of fire. . . .

When the Banshee Calls.....Wayne Rogers 106
Would it never come; the merciful thrust of the knife that would put an end to agony almost unendurable? Or was it her doom to be forever one of the living dead. . . .

THREE MYSTERY-TERROR SHORTS

Beauty and the Butcher.....Holden Sanford 25
In my hand is a bloody knife and beside me the crimson fragment of a human ear! And, God help me, I know it's the ear of the woman I love!

Kiss of the Flame Blossom.....Donald Dale 69
Whether she was woman or devil, I will never know, but when she stood before me in all her awful beauty, all thoughts of love and honor fled from my mind and I arose to answer her call—to embrace the Blossom of Fire!

Cat-Woman.....Ray Cummings 94
I feel the eyes of my bride upon me—watchful, waiting, slumberous—like the eyes of a cat on a mouse. Soon, I think, she will . . . *pounce!*

Black Chapel.....A Department 120

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BEAUTY and the BUTCHER

by Holden Sanford



What awful power from the Pit of Pain placed a bloody knife by my bridal bed, and on the white night-table—the severed ear of my bride!

AT FIRST I was conscious only of a blazing pain in my head and reality remained in a hazy borderland. Then slowly the vague memories of the past evening came back to me. Last night my fiancée, Loretta Kane, had given a banquet for the entire wedding party—we were to be married in a week's time. Still half conscious, I tried to recall the end of the evening but without success. There had been trouble of some kind—I couldn't remember what—and the gay party had come to an ugly conclusion. Purposely I hadn't drunk much, but the last thing I could call to mind was struggling against a feeling of intox-

ication, raging at myself for being such a fool. How I'd gotten home, into bed, was a blank in my mind—and Loretta, I couldn't remember escorting her to her house!

In an instant I was bolt upright in bed looking wildly about—at strange furniture and an unfamiliar room. I was still dressed in my evening clothes of the night before.

"Fool, fool!" I groaned, swinging my legs to the floor and getting unsteadily to my feet. What had caused me to wake up in a strange house at an unknown hour after having deserted my fiancée the previous night—beautiful Loretta, the most-

photographed deb of the season? And she was marrying a damned . . . but suddenly my mind snapped out of it and I stood transfixed in the center of the room. *What was that object on the dresser?*

Little pin-points of horror prickled up my spine and surged through my scalp as a sanity-shaking dread seized my mind. Standing before the dresser with my mouth stupidly agape, I gazed down at a bloody carving knife which was neatly laid beside my gloves and top hat. How did this knife get here? What had happened last night? Where was I? *What had I done?* Suddenly I strode over to the bedroom door; I'd rouse someone in the house, find out where I was and what had happened. I was jolted to a stop in front of the door—it was locked from the outside. I was a prisoner!

Panic surged over me in that instant and I beat the door with my fists. After a moment I heard running footsteps pounding down the hall outside, and I ceased my clamor.

"David!" a voice called through the door. "Shut up that racket; you'll wake the whole countryside."

With relief I recognized Paul Markheim's voice, one of the guests at the dinner the night before who was scheduled to act as my best man at the wedding. My older brother had been Paul's best man, and I was returning the compliment seven years later.

"Then open up," I shouted. "Am I supposed to be a prisoner?"

There was a short silence from the hall, and then Paul's voice asked hesitantly, "Are you . . . sure you're . . . all right, David?"

My anger flared up again. "Of course I'm all right. Open up; snap into it!"

I heard the lock click open and the door swung slowly inward. Paul was standing in the hall, back from the door.

"Come into the library," he said. "Something awful has happened; there's

hell to pay. I don't know what to do."

I followed him down the hall and into the library, dimly realizing that this was Paul Markheim's new country house, a good fifty miles from the city where the banquet was held.

"What's happened?" I asked in a strained voice.

"Loretta's missing," he replied tersely. His shaking hands put a cigarette between his pale lips. "Her family's been telephoning all over town. They even called here. I said I thought she was with you, that everything was all right."

"You knew damned well she wasn't with me," I blazed up. "And you knew I was locked in that room. Do some explaining, Mister!"

Paul raised his hand and pointed at me. "Explain that," he said, and I looked down with horror at the dark red stains on my stiff shirtfront—stains of dried blood.

I SAT dumbly on the couch, my mind a whirlpool of conjecture, while Paul repeated what he knew of the night before.

"Everything was going nicely," he said, "when suddenly the drinks you had had began to tell on you. Loretta appealed to me for help, so I quietly asked you if you hadn't had enough, but that only made you angry. You became surly to the whole crowd—even to Loretta—and I was afraid a fight might start. Then suddenly you disappeared, I didn't see you for some time. Then Loretta disappeared too, and I went searching for the two of you, fearful that a quarrel might develop. Well, I found you all right. You were out on the front lawn, semi-conscious."

"Oh, my God," I groaned.

"Loretta wasn't anywhere to be seen," he continued, "but I noticed that your shirtfront was stained with blood. In your hand was—"

"Yes," I interrupted dully. "I saw the knife: it's in my room."

"I couldn't break your grip on it," Paul said. Then his voice became more strained than ever. "But there was something else there that you didn't see!" and he walked to the library table, taking out of the drawer a soiled bundle, evidently a pocket handkerchief stained with blood. He unwrapped it before me.

Great God! My head reeled and spun. Nauseating horror slithered up and down my backbone and the pit of my stomach curled with revulsion. Lying in the handkerchief, blotched and stained with blood, was a severed human ear—a girl's ear—with a small diamond earring still in place! *And that earring I knew to be Loretta's!* I had given them to her myself as an engagement present.

"I didn't know what to do," Paul continued hurriedly. "I wanted to be loyal both to you and to Loretta. She was missing—abducted or crazed with pain and horrible mutilation. If the police found you they'd surely throw you in jail. So I quickly put you in my car and drove directly out here where you'll be safe—until the truth of this thing comes out. I might just as well tell you that I locked you in your room last night partly as a protection from that murderous knife you still had, and partly to be sure you wouldn't escape.

"You know that I have a wife and children I love dearly," he went on, "and in the name of that love I intend to find the truth of this horrible mutilation. I'll be impartial but just. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Call the police," I said dully. "I can't believe I've done this thing—I *know* I couldn't have done it. It's a gruesome plot against me. Perhaps she was kidnaped—that's it, Loretta *was* kidnaped and this whole thing is a camouflage to throw the police off the trail. God knows what they are doing to her now, to what indignities and horrors she's being subjected!" At that thought a frenzy came over me and I leaped to my feet. "*We've got to find Loretta—now, right away!*" I screamed at him. I wheeled about toward the door, when a firm command behind me made me turn.

Paul had an automatic in his hand. "You will not leave my sight until this whole thing is over," he said. "You may consider yourself in my custody. I'll accept your word of honor not to escape." I nodded, and he put the gun away.

At that moment the telephone rang and Paul picked it up. His voice became excited as he talked, and when he had finished he slammed the receiver down and swung toward me.

"That was Loretta's father, Judge Kane," he burst out in an excited voice.



"He said he'd just received a mysterious telephone call from their summer home—a girl's voice—but the call was cut off. He's notifying the police, but we're much closer. Let's get up there pronto!"

"Come on!" I shouted, and we were downstairs and out of the house within a minute. Paul's car was at the door and we slammed into the front seat and were roaring out the driveway and up the highway like a flash.

I'LL always remember that ride—Paul Markheim bending over the wheel, his eyes riveted on the road ahead, the screeching tires wailing like demons as we slithered around turns, the motor hitting a high-pitched whine as we roared into the straightaway.

During that whole ride a kaleidoscopic series of horrible mental pictures and torturing thoughts flashed through my mind. Had I, a normally light-drinking man, butchered the one I held most dear in a fit of drunken rage? Had alcohol made me a fiendish demon bereft of all moral control, mutilating my own sweetheart? Or was I the victim of circumstances accidentally or deliberately arranged to point the finger of loathsome guilt at me? Could Paul be at the bottom of this devilish abduction? But Paul was ten years older than I, the father of two children and husband of a lovely wife. He seemed to be fighting to find Loretta's mutilator, even to the point of suspecting me! I was bewildered, dazed, fearful, hurt beyond physical pain. Then, a hail of gravel smashing against the mudguards like gunfire, we slewed up the private driveway and slammed to a stop before the front of the quiet, seemingly deserted house.

In a bound Paul and I were out of the car and up the steps. The front door was locked and with a curse I smashed my fist through a pane of glass, reached in and opened the door. Paul still had his automatic. He drew it now and we

started to make a swift but silent search of the house. We were just before the living room door when a harsh voice lashed out a command from behind us:

"Hold it! Stand where you are! Reach!"

Slowly my hands went up toward the ceiling, and I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Paul had managed to slip his gun in his pocket unobserved by the man behind us before putting up his hands.

"March into the living room!" the voice grated.

We marched in, hands in the air, and turned to view our captor. It was Jacques, Loretta's chauffeur! His eyes shifted uneasily from one to the other of us, the ugly, snub automatic wavering slowly back and forth, ready to blast out at any hostile move. His look blazed cold, vindictive hate.

Suddenly every muscle in me tensed with hope and fury. I could see that Paul was getting ready to take a desperate chance. In a flash he threw himself to the floor, out of the range of the gun, his hand darting to his pocket for his own gun. In that same second my tensed body launched forward arrow-like, arms flailing the air. Like a cat, with amazing agility, Jacques sprang backward his gun blazing searing lead at the same instant. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a red well of blood spurt from a long crease in Paul's forehead. In the next instant I was crashed to my knees from midair by a smashing molten pain that halted my charge like a steel door. I tried to struggle to my feet again, my only strength the thought of Loretta's slender beauty, but a ton of blackness crushed me to the floor and sickeningly I drifted into senselessness.

I DON'T think I had been out for more than a minute when I was conscious of an urgent voice whispering my name, calling me back to my senses.

"David, David! Snap out of it, boy!"

With pain searing my eyeballs and weakness paralyzing every muscle of my body I rolled over and saw Paul lying not six feet away from me. He had been securely bound, hand and foot, the flesh wound along his forehead apparently only sufficient to stun him for a moment.

"Quick, David," he whispered. "Now's our chance. That devil has left you for dead, or else has gone for more rope to hog-tie you as well as me. Hurry, boy. Loosen these bonds and we've won. Just one last effort!"

Groaning, I rolled on my face and crept toward him. It seemed an eternity of pain to crawl those six feet and fumble at the knots that secured Paul's arms. My right arm was useless and my shirt and coat were drenched with blood. As I fumbled ineptly a horrible sing-song of dizziness rang and buzzed through my head.

At length Paul's arms were freed. Then, getting to his feet, he pulled me up beside him and supported me on waver- ing legs.

"That fool didn't even search me for a gun, David," he said. "Come on and be in at the kill. I think he's gone to the cellar—perhaps Loretta's held captive there. God knows what he's doing to her now!"

Paul's words caused the hot strength of fury to flow through my veins, and I threw back my shoulders and steadied on my feet.

Paul led the way out through the but- ler's pantry and into the kitchen. Down below we could hear frightened voices, and my heart quickened when I recog- nized Loretta's soft tones.

Paul went down the cellar steps first, gun in hand, and I crept behind him. When my eyes came below the level of the eaves of the cellar roof an involuntary gasp of horror and rage escaped my throat. Over against the wall at one end of the cellar stood two girls, both stripped

of all their clothes except for thin, filmy underwear. Loretta's black silk-and-lace ensemble gave off a dull sheen from the unshaded lamp overhead. Both girls stood with their arms straight up in the air, suspended by ropes tied about their wrists and fastened to a ceiling-pipe overhead. The girl with Loretta I recognized as one of the bridesmaids, a young, shy little thing I did not know very well, named Helen. She was crying softly, probably at the shame and degradation she felt at her indecent, helpless exposure. Judge Kane sat at one side of the room, roped tightly to a chair, his agonized eyes never leaving Loretta's pale strained face. Jacques stood before the girl who was weeping in such a hopeless heart-broken way, his hands fumbling with the rope which bound her.

The paralysis and shock of the stark evil of that scene held me speechless for a moment, but as revulsion and fury arose within me my voice returned and I screamed a curse at the damnable torturer in the room below. At that sound he spun toward us, his hand streaking for his side pocket. But his hand never reached his side, for Paul's savage .32 Colt split a vicious reply that froze Jacques' motion. For a moment he stood immobile, an expression of amazement and unbelief on his face, then he gave a wet choking cough and sprangled his length on the floor at the girls' feet.

Both girls screamed and Judge Kane bellowed like a bull as Jacques fell, and in that instant I started forward to Loretta, pity and tenderness surging within me. It was deliverance! But a rough hand stopped me in my stride and swung me about. It was Paul—and in that instant of surprise and confusion I was wide open for the smashing right hook that lifted me off my feet and crashed my body against the wall beside the girls. I was too weak from loss of blood and exhaustion to rise and fight again—I lay

against the wall helpless, groggy, stunned. My mind couldn't reason why it was Paul's fist that had turned against me, jolted me helpless in our moment of victory.

AT no time did I lose consciousness after that blow, but the weakness caused by my wound and my light-headed helplessness made the whole scene that followed seem like the ghastly nightmare of a diseased mind. Paul gave one glance in my direction and then contemptuously looked away, wiping the blood from his knuckles. Loretta was suspended just above me and I heard her whispering, more to herself than to me.

"Oh, David, David! What have you done? Jacques was trying to help us. He became suspicious of Paul Markheim when dad and I disappeared last night so he trailed us here—but he made the mistake of coming alone. He had just arrived when he saw you and Paul coming in; naturally he suspected that you were in league with Paul, so he tried to capture the two of you. He was just setting us free when he was shot." Loretta didn't say any more, but I heard her choke back a sob that came to her throat.

The whole vile scheme was apparent to me now: Paul's tricks with bloody knife and the supposedly human ear; his cunning insistence that I was his prisoner; his faked telephone call to get me here; and worst of all, his duping me into setting him free so that he might *mutilate and torture the girl I loved!* My agonized eyes turned to Loretta, to the round maidenly firmness of her out-thrust breasts, to the rippling grace of the muscles that ran through her slender shapely legs, to the soft, gentle curves of her virgin thighs and the satin-smooth rose-petal skin of her abdomen. The fury of my impotent rage within my shattered body almost brought tears to my eyes.

During this long moment Paul Mark-

heim paid no attention to us, while Judge Kane remained helpless in his chair breathing with great, hollow gasps, and little Helen's virgin breasts heaved spasmodically with each sob of shame. Bending over a table, Paul Markheim had removed a long flat metal case from his pocket and was busily absorbed with its contents. Finally he straightened up with a hypodermic needle in his hand. Then he rolled back his sleeve and jabbed the needle into a vein, pressing the plunger home. He stood for a minute holding the table as the trembling of his hands and the twitching of his face stopped and a flush of color suffused his white face. After a second he strode over in front of us, his eyes unnaturally alight, blazing with the false unbalanced courage and evil assurance of the confirmed dope fiend. In his hand he held a long, narrow-bladed knife, his eyes tauntingly on Loretta's slender white body, his face blazing with a drug-maddened lascivious expression, evil in every line. Then his eyes turned to Helen's body and he reached a hand slowly toward her, chuckling vilely at her cringing fear, gloating in his madness at her shrinking, trembling figure. When his hand touched her body Helen's racking sobs were arrested by her welling terror, and she stood stiff and frozen, scarcely breathing. Markheim's fingers groped into the depression between Helen's firm, erect breasts, grasped her sheer underclothing, and with a single powerful sweep of his hand stripped her completely naked. A crimson flush overspread her face and she made pitifully modest attempts to writhe her torso and legs into a position to conceal her nudity. In a partial coma I lay against the wall unable to move, only able to watch with agonized eyes, steeped to the very soul in this insane orgy of unnatural, demented lust. Judge Kane roared violent curses that filled the room, while Loretta moaned in sympathy, her white body writhing.

TURNING soon of this torture, Markheim raised his knife and advanced toward the girl. There was none of the lustful pleasure of the unnatural madman who inflicts pain for his own pleasure in Markheim's attitude. Instead, he seemed to enjoy a certain perverted, drug-crazed humor in the victim's terror and attempts to escape. Furthermore, like all drug addicts, he blamed society for his own pitiful enslavement and inflicted pain and suffering on others to have revenge for his own torment. Poor Helen was the victim at the moment, and I saw her horrified eyes follow the slowly advancing knife as a bird watches the snake which is to kill it. Her scream ripped through the room and I saw a long red gash on one of her hips, a trail of blood running down the back of her leg. Next a bloody gash appeared on one breast, another on her abdomen. I closed my eyes and clenched my hands after that, trying not to hear the pitiful screams and moans and the wild thrashing of her body. After an eternity of horror the thrashing movements stopped, and the little figure hung limp and motionless in the bonds.

I knew that Judge Kane had been trying not to see or hear the dreadful torment and mutilation, just as I had. When he spoke now his voice was tired, dead, toneless.

"Markheim," he said, "you're a foul beast. I told you before that I'd give you anything you wanted if you'd spare these girls—money, anything. What more could you possibly want?"

"Plenty more!" Markheim snarled. "I'll take and do anything I please and when I'm tired you'll give me everything I want anyway—for your daughter's life! I want—*must have*—two things: money, lots of it, and revenge!"

"For God's sake, Markheim," I managed to gasp weakly, "you've got plenty of money—more than you need; and why revenge from Judge Kane?"

He swung his eyes toward me and I saw the fearful unreasoning blaze of narcotics burning there. "Money?" he snarled. "Lots of it? Perhaps you don't know that my wife and children left me a week ago when my wife learned of my habit. Perhaps you don't know that Judge Kane slapped a restraining order on our joint bank account—and that my wife can easily prove the money was all hers in the beginning. Maybe you don't know that drugs cost money and lots of it—and *without drugs I'll go mad, rot in an insane asylum!* I'll get money, and I'll get revenge on the one who is responsible for my whole downfall—all from you, Kane!

"After I've had my pleasure with the charming Loretta," Markheim continued, "the learned Judge over here," he gave a mocking bow in the Judge's direction, "will sign a few checks on various of his banks, confirm those checks by telephone, and the bridegroom, accommodating David, will go to the city and return with the cash—if he wants to see either of you alive again! After that, you'll pardon me if I take the first boat for Europe and points East."

As he was speaking, Markheim had been slowly advancing on Loretta. Out of the corner of my eye I had caught sight of a slight motion on the part of Jacques. It surprised me because I had thought him dead. Then I suddenly remembered . . . *the gun was still in his pocket when he was shot down!*

Would he regain consciousness? Would he remember the gun if he did? Oh, how I prayed at that moment. As if in answer to my prayer I saw Jacques move again. By this time Markheim was directly in front of Loretta. Bruskiy, roughly, he reached out and ripped her underclothes from her, revealing her statuesque, marble-like body in all its sylphlike slenderness and warmth.

"I cannot be quite so tender with you, my dear," Markheim said with a cruel

leer. "I'm afraid a little amputation will be necessary. Now, Judge, how much am I bid for a shell-pink ear? Or, perhaps, you would prefer a little soft, virgin breast?" The Judge's eyes were closed, his teeth clenched until the jaw-muscles showed white under his skin. Even Loretta didn't make a sound during this deliberate torturing delay. She was saving her father that much.

WILDLY, the sweat of despair and cold horror on my brow, I looked again at Jacques. *God in Heaven!* Jacques had managed to get the gun out of his pocket—after how many minutes of excruciating pain and mental agony I could not say. Huddled as he was on the floor he had managed to bring the gun up on Paul Markheim. His eyes starting from his head, the perspiration of suffering incarnate on his brow, Jacques was trying to gain a last reserve of strength—only enough to pull that trigger! I could see the black pools of agony in his staring eyes, could hear the quick pain-seared gasps for breath as he struggled to pull the trigger of that gun.

A scream from Loretta wrenched my eyes to the gruesome drama in front of me. Markheim, oblivious to Jacques struggles, had continued with his torture of the father and daughter. With fiendish slowness he had cut a light circle around Loretta's left breast. He was laughing in unholy delight at the pain he was causing both Loretta and the Judge.

A sudden gasp made my eyes snap back to Jacques—he had collapsed in exhaustion, a thin stream of bubbly blood running from his mouth. I knew then that he could never fire that shot. Then, as I watched, his arm that held the gun began to straighten out on the floor. Agonizingly, by fractions of an inch, his arm straightened along the wall toward me. It was his last hope, but I knew I could never reach that gun . . . *then his plan flashed into my*

mind! He was placing the gun under Loretta's feet!

At that moment Loretta gave another scream, and I saw that Markheim had cut her a bit deeper. The Judge groaned and ground his teeth, and my blood turned to ice. Markheim screamed with mad laughter.

At that instant Loretta felt the cold steel of the automatic against her foot. With superhuman presence of mind she didn't look down, knew what it was. Slowly her toes gripped around the gun, then, with a sudden movement, she skidded it across to me.

Markheim stepped back, suddenly alarmed. But my fumbling hands had grasped the gun, had closed on the butt, two fingers twining about the trigger. Markheim's gun was laying on the table where he had left it. His eyes never left mine and they shone with a tortured fascination as he looked straight down the staring black hole that was the actual eye of death. Sweat broke out on his face and the knife dropped from his nerveless hand; he seemed to have no thought of any possible escape from this certain death.

"I'm doing you a favor, Markheim," I croaked, "in sending you straight to hell. It won't be as painful as your life here on earth would have been."

Then the gun roared and blasted him back across the table behind him where his own gun was. But he didn't try to reach

for it. He stood up again on rubber legs and slowly walked toward me again as though asking for more. The stupid, lopsided grin on his face leered with an unbelieving wonder. Again my gun exploded and the force of the slug spun Markheim around in a circle like a top, at length slamming him in a sprawl at the foot of the table. He lay where he fell, never twitching a muscle.

Staggering drunkenly, I picked up Markheim's knife and cut Loretta's bonds. Then I turned toward the unconscious Helen, but I never completed that trip. The room was suddenly filled with soft black feathers and I drifted into them with a long sigh. Unconsciousness surged over me.

WHEN I came back to reality, I was in a hospital and Loretta was at my side. She tied in what little details I didn't know and gave me the end of the story: Jacques and Helen would recover with rest and treatment; she, herself, hadn't even had to go to bed; Jacques' suspicions had first been aroused when he discovered that Markheim was spicing my drinks with generous shots of chloral hydrate, a powerful sedative, and some other knock-out drug.

The nurse told me I would be up and about in a week. I knew that Loretta and I would be married immediately, but I didn't have to ask the nurse that: I could see it in Loretta's eyes.