

# 10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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## TWO FULL-LENGTH NOVELS OF EERIE MYSTERY

- Necklaces for the Dying.....By Frederick C. Davis 8  
*Claire Forester feared the rabid passion that stared at her from out the stone-cutter's lust-filled eyes—feared, too, those fabulously strong hands, which some whispered, shaped ghastly necklaces for the dying. . . .*
- Brides for the Beast.....By Wayne Rogers 40  
*A lust-mad scientist whispered secrets concerning her lover's birth to Minna Talbot—while a mad thing, whose origin was unknown, brought terror to that mountain wilderness. . . .*

## TWO WEIRDLY REALISTIC MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

- The Embalmers.....By Garry Grant 76  
*Was Marmon truly mad as he stood grim vigil beside the white, still body of his beloved—protecting her from perils which only the living should fear?*
- Convicts from Hell.....By George Alden Edson 104  
*Thousands of volts of electricity swept through his quivering body—but Nan Raymond feared that his grisly promise to return and wreak ghastly vengeance upon her would be kept!*

## SHORT TALES OF GRIPPING TERROR

- Death's Warm Fireside.....By Paul Ernst 34  
*Through strangely clinging snowdrifts Malcolm Slade tardily returned to a lost love.*
- Bedfellow from Hell.....By Larry Moore 67  
*Leona awakened to find her bed invaded by one whose grisly passions were not of this earth!*
- Locked in With Death.....By Dale Clark 95  
*Girls, whose beauty condemned them to horrible death, cowered in their homes—where their danger was greatest!*

—AND—

- Dark Council.....A Department 122

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# BEDFELLOW FROM HELL

By Larry Moore

*In the dead of night Leona awakened in that old dark house—to find that her bed had been invaded by a being whose grisly passions were not of this earth!*

**A**S Leona looked up into the yellow-flecked, agate eyes of Talbot Rhone, she seemed to feel the clutch of icy fingers on her heart. “You won’t marry me, then,” he said in an odd, tight tone. “You insist upon going to live in that weird old house?”

“I’ve always told you that I couldn’t marry you, Talbot, and I most certainly am going to live in the comfortable home I have inherited,” she asserted firmly, purpose unshaken though the chill was spreading from her heart throughout her body. “As a physician you have assured me that I am in a state of exhaustion, that I should have complete physical and mental relaxation—in the country. What better place could there be than this fine old house of Great-Aunt Judith’s, in Greyport?”

“Leona!” He bent his head, holding her eyes by his intense gaze. “As a physician I tell you that is the last place you should go—to a house so old it is saturated with dead, mouldering things. Its very timbers creak and groan from the stress of past griefs that fill the ancient rooms to bursting. Youth should have new things, sunshine, color—not decay, the shadows and miasma that arise from graves. Give up this idea—let *me* take you away!”



His hand was on her arm, the fingers hot, yet their touch sent a freezing current through her veins.

"No." She tried to free herself. "I shall not change my mind. And I'll love that old home—mellowed by time, where people have joyed as well as sorrowed."

"Dead—people!" he whispered.

Then his clasp tightened, bit into the soft flesh of her arm. The yellow flecks in his eyes spread to a blaze that leaped at her.

"It's Tom Farrell who's come between us!" he burst out hotly. "And I say that you'll never marry him. . . . *Something* will prevent!"

"I shall marry Tom as soon as he comes back from this engineering project," she said steadily. Leona had meant to keep this fact to herself, sensing Talbot Rhone's unreasoning and unjustifiable jealousy. But his words stung her to speech.

He searched her face for a moment. Then his expression changed and he released her.

"I'm sorry—forgive me," he implored. "My love for you—sets me crazy—at thought of another man. . . . But, more than all I want to protect you. It worried me to think of you going to live in that house of—" He broke off, with a slight shudder. "We'll forget all I said, and when I come to Greypoint—you know I often run down to see the old folks—I'll look you up and see that you're all right. After all, we're sort of cousins, since one of mine married one of yours. And I used to play in your Aunt Judith's house—maybe it isn't as bad as I remember it. But the thought of it certainly did give me goose-flesh on a hot summer day." His laugh was almost convincing.

**L**EONA as glad to leave him, and walked briskly. Though her dislike had been growing through the two years

he had been importuning her to marry him, never till that day had his manner stirred fear. She tried to banish this, reminding herself that Talbot exerted himself to do much that was good, giving considerable time to charity patients and to work in the county hospital. . . .

A week later she was in Greypoint taking formal possession of her new home. She had immediate evidence of Talbot Rhone's concern for her, when the attorney in charge of the property said:

"I wrote you the former housekeeper was getting too old for the place, and I was having difficulty getting anyone suitable. Wouldn't have one yet, either, if Dr. Rhone hadn't happened down to see his folks a few days ago. He learned of it and recommended a capable woman—patient of his—who was glad to get the position. The Doc says you aren't well—need to be favored quite a bit."

"I only need rest," Ruth said, aware that a little wave of gratitude went out to Talbot.

It was a sunless day with wisps of fog trailing sadly through the air, and she had rather dreaded the possibility of arriving at a lonely house. The presence of another woman would be cheering.

She was more glad of this assurance when they neared the edge of the village and came into view of the old Purdy House among its terraces and somber, crowding evergreens. Smoke came from the two chimneys to droop in sable plumes to the ground. The box hedge gave off a faint, not pleasant odor into the clammy air. The place was permeated with gloom.

Involuntarily Leona shivered, her glance going from sodden terraces and funereal trees to the mist-saturated and time-stained brick walls of the dwelling.

"Decay—old things—dead things," she thought with another shiver. "Oh, I do wish Talbot hadn't said that!"

Bravely she threw off the mood, enter-

ing the dwelling to greet the housekeeper with friendly warmth. This was returned by the stout woman who at once displayed signs of wishing to "mother" the girl. But despite Mrs. Graham's cheerfulness, the warmth of generous fires, the interior of the house repeated the effect of the outside. The walls were covered with paper of not one, but several, generations past. The hangings while clean, were drab with the faded colors of half a century. And the graveyard smell of the damp hedge appeared to have seeped through the small-paned windows.

That day brought no sun. As the hours passed, the fog wisps thickened, drew together to form trailing streamers that at times hung motionless, at others swirled weirdly about.

"It does look like a winding sheet," Mrs. Graham commented. "Makes you think of the poor soul that's just gone from here!"

"Oh, don't!" Leona exclaimed.

"Do excuse me, Miss Wade," the older woman begged contritely. "I forgot Dr. Rhone said you wasn't to be disturbed nor made nervous about anything. And you mustn't get to—imagining things—it's dangerous when a body's near a nervous breakdown." These words seemed to hang heavily in the air, as Mrs. Graham turned away.

Leona moved restlessly through the many rooms, all bleak in appearance, family portraits on the walls of each. And the female Purdy ancestors all seemed to have affected one style of hairdressing, parted in the center and brought low over the ears. The effect of so many similar ones suggested a collection of family ghosts hanging on the walls. The girl tried not to look at them.

Learning that the housekeeper's room was on the lower floor of the east wing, Leona chose one above, to be near the only other occupant of the house. Miss

Judith Purdy had occupied a room off the main hall, at right angles to the one taken by Leona.

THE coming of night and closing in of the fog to an unbroken, clammy curtain, shut out the world. This isolation added to the gloom of the house and the girl found herself continually forcing her thoughts from the words Talbot Rhone had used to describe the place. Shortly after ten o'clock she went upstairs.

The blazing fire on her hearth and her own things scattered about had a pleasant effect, and for a few moments her mood lightened. Then she raised a shade preparatory to opening a window for the night. She halted, outstretched hand on the sash, eyes staring through the glass and across the open space to a window in the main building, from which shone a bluish-white light.

A woman sat there—a woman with black hair parted in the middle and brought down over her ears. And she wore a dress like one Leona had seen in Great-Aunt Judith's closet, that day. This figure was knitting and rocking steadily back and forth.

The fog drifted between, but that bluish light filtered through uncannily.

A scream rose to Leona's lips, "Oh! Mrs. Graham! Come—come!"

There was the sound of running feet, an encouraging call, and a moment later the housekeeper came panting up the stairs.

"Look—look!" the girl gasped, pointing at the window.

The woman came close to her side, gazing at that other window. She shook her head, giving the girl a puzzled look. "What is it?"

"Oh, God—can't you *see* her?" Leona gasped.

"Dearie—there isn't anything to see, but fog, and the dark wall of the house."

The girl stared through wild, dilated eyes. "It's Aunt Judith!" she cried chokingly.

Mrs. Graham shook her head anxiously. "See here, my dear," she murmured, putting an arm about the shaking figure. "I'm going to draw that curtain to shut out that awful fog—it makes you imagine things—"

"*Imagine*—things!" Leona exclaimed tensely.

The other woman continued as if she didn't notice the interruption. "And I'm going to get you some hot milk, which you must drink and I'll sit with you till you go to sleep."

She tucked the girl into the bed, turned on all the lights and hurried to the kitchen. She was back in a surprisingly short space of time. Leona drank the steaming liquid without question. Afterwards she directed firmly:

"Raise that shade—just a second—I *must* see!"

But there was no blue light shining from the other window—only fog swirls harboring in the corner between the wing and the main building.

Holding tight to Mrs. Graham's plump hand, Leona fell asleep. And it was broad day when she awakened.

**C**OMPELLED to decide that she actually had imagined the figure in her Great-Aunt Judith's window, Leona forced her thoughts from re-creating that picture in memory. And the morning brought word that Tom Farrell would be in Greypoint within the next three days.

"Everything'll be all right then!" she assured Mrs. Graham with a radiant smile on her red lips.

By night the girl found courage to go alone to her room. "I mustn't let this nonsense got hold of me," she assured herself valiantly, succeeding in allaying fear for the moment.

But terror, far exceeding that of the former night, seized Leona when she looked from her window. There was the same woman's figure, this time with head lifted to stare straight across the space at her. The features were livid, the eyes burning with unearthly fire.

With a wild cry, Leona ran from her room and through the hall to the head of the staircase. There she came to an abrupt halt, crouching against the balustrade, the screams silenced in her throat. At the foot of the stairs stood another woman with dark hair parted smoothly in the center, winglike folds over each ear. But this one was thinner than Aunt Judith. The same bluish-white light revealed her clearly. She tilted her head to look up and Leona saw with horror-drenched senses that the face was the bony, fleshless one of a skeleton.

Above a body dressed in commonplace clothing, the effect was far more dreadful than to glimpse an entire skeleton form.

"O-o-oh! O-o-oh!" Leona moaned.

Her quivering limbs would not carry her weight. She sank lower, flesh crawling with icy terror. Was that terrible thing with the skeleton face advancing up the stairs? And what of that other—the one in Aunt Judith's room—such a short distance away—was that gliding noiselessly upon her from the rear?

As if in answer to the question, she heard a slight rustling. Her scalp prickled at the roots of her hair. Icy perspiration drenched her forehead. Her heart labored heavily.

Another rustling. Something bent above her, shutting off the air, exuding that odor of the grave that assailed her from the box hedge when she arrived. Cold, stiff fingers clamped on her arm. An icy hand touched her cheek, went downward to her throat, to linger.

Oh God—was this terrible thing going

to choke the life from her body? Was she, right then, to become one of the Dead, in that house?

She lapsed into insensibility. . . .

"My dear—what is it? There, there, poor lamb!" came vaguely to her ears.

Gentle arms held her, warm arms that drew her protectively against a warm breast. The damp hair was smoothed back from her brow. Opening her eyes, Leona gazed up into Mrs. Graham's face, the pallor of which betrayed her concern.

"She was there at the window—again," Leona gasped. "And there was another—a horrible thing—" She could utter no more and it was many minutes before she could fully explain, the housekeeper holding her closely while she gasped and shuddered.

"My dear, you must get hold of yourself," said the housekeeper firmly. "Your friends are anxious about you—but we will fight this thing, together. It would be dreadful if you should get to—imagining these things, till they had to take you away!" The last words were barely whispered, suggesting a horrible thing that clutched Leona's heart to squeeze it with renewed terror.

"You don't mean—that—" she could not go on, could not put the grisly fear into words.

"No, indeed!" the housekeeper insisted stoutly. "We won't let anyone do a thing like that. You're a brave girl—you'll conquer your nerves. You are not going to see another thing. I shall stay with you at night, after this."

"I'm not really losing my mind," Leona thought, trying to subdue that devastating panic. "This is just because I'm worn out. I must dream—it can't be anything else!"

**H**OPE that Tom would come that day, was in vain. But with mid-afternoon, Talbot Rhone appeared. Leona had be-

lieved Greypoint would be a refuge from his attentions, had no idea he revisited his old home so often.

"This is just a call," he remarked. "I'm catching the next train back to the city. Just wanted to be sure you're making it all right."

"I certainly am," she said, wishing he wouldn't look at her like that, with the yellow spots in his eyes fusing into that dreadful flame.

"You're not looking well. Do you sleep?" he asked gravely.

"Most of the night," she evaded. Not for worlds would she confess her experiences to him, though she felt that he was willing her to say more. She feared him, feared what peeped starkly from his eyes. With sudden alarming clarity of vision, she saw that he would welcome any barrier that set her away from Tom. "He wouldn't care if I went crazy. Maybe that's why he talked as he did about this house—hoping to frighten me. But I won't let go of myself—I won't imagine those horrible things, again!"

Rhone left in a few minutes, his manner one of friendly solicitude. But the look in his eyes remained with Leona.

If the housekeeper slept in the room adjoining hers, Leona insisted that would be sufficient protection against the fright that held her with a cold grip at thought of the two previous nights. The older woman insisted upon tucking her into bed. Then she raised the shade.

"Now—take a look across there, and you'll see that there's no one in the poor lady's room."

Clasping her hands tight, Leona looked, across the space to that other window—it was blank.

"Oh!" she sighed with a great relief of taut nerves. "I didn't see it—I didn't!"

The proffered glass of hot milk was taken and Leona lay down with a feeling of real relaxation. "I've been so fright-

ened," she murmured, "not of ghosts—but of my own mind. I've been afraid—I might be taken away—where I couldn't see Tom again!"

Night stillness fell over the big house. Mrs. Graham had retired to her room, and Leona slept. She had no memory of being aroused by anything. Consciousness merely drifted slowly back to her. At first she dimly believed that the housekeeper had lain down beside her. There was someone in the bed. But—strangely there was no sound of breathing. And the girl was aware of a chill, as if something very, very cold were near.

She came wide awake.

Somebody was lying close beside her. A someone that was rigid. Against the warmth of her own limbs pressed something hard and chill like marble—only more terrible. Her outflung hand came in contact with an icy, dreadful face.

"Oh God!" she shrieked in a frenzy of horror, cringing from the dead thing at her side.

Light! She must see!

Flinging herself over the edge of the bed, she caught the suspended light cord. The room was flooded with brilliance. And on the pillow beside the one on which Leona's head had rested, lay a woman's head. The hair was parted smoothly in the middle and brought down over the ears. The features were waxen and rigid in death. Under the bedclothes, the body was clearly outlined.

With a cry torn in extremity of terror, from her throat, Leona ran from the room. She did not even hear the housekeeper's voice as she fled. That icy, lifeless flesh still seemed pressed against her. The smell of death was in her nostrils. Had hell itself opened, disgorging all the evil spirits from its fetid maw, her frenzy of fear would have been no greater.

Steps followed her. She knew what they meant—this dead woman was com-

ing after her, just as that dead one had come from Aunt Judith's room the previous night, to touch her. She could not bear that again. She glanced back. In the bedroom door stood the body which had lain in the bed, sightless eyes turned towards Leona.

"I can't help it—I can't help it!" she screamed frantically. "It is there! I do see it! Oh—God—help me!"

**T**ERROR swept her over the borderland of consciousness into an oblivion that endured for many hours. The new day was born of the sun, before her eyes opened. Then her senses seemed drugged, as she remembered feeling after the administration of a hypodermic. But the horror of memory pierced her, re-creating the frenzy of the night. It seemed to Leona that she could not endure Mrs. Graham's assurance that she had slept quietly.

"I couldn't have!" she protested through pallid, quivering lips.

She turned to stare at the pillow beside her. Again her nostrils seemed to be assailed by that odor of the grave. It lingered about the bed clothing, stifled her. A shaking hand pointed at the spot where death had lain.

"A dead body was there!" she cried. "It followed me to the hall. It had hair like the pictures on the walls—oh!"

"My dear, you mustn't let yourself think these things," the housekeeper implored, taking the icy hands in her warm clasp.

"I didn't imagine *that!*" Leona denied. "I *felt* the body, its awful chill went through me. I am *not* losing my mind. I tell you, this *is* a house of dead things!"

The older woman shook her head as if helpless to meet the situation. "Perhaps, if we sent for Dr. Carpenter—he lives in the village—he could help you."

"No doctor could help me," Leona

shuddered. She would not risk a medical man's thinking she conjured these horrors from within her own mind. "I'm going away from here—after Tom comes."

Later in the afternoon she came to a sudden decision. "I'm going for a walk," she told the housekeeper, turning to the door as the words fell from her lips.

Leona walked to the telegraph office where she sent a message to Tom Farrell in care of his company's New York office.

It read:

**Am in dreadful trouble. Come direct to the house, no matter what hour you arrive in Greypoint.**

**Leona Wade.**

The return to the house did not seem quite so bad, when this word had sped on its way to Tom. It was almost like speaking to him—seemed to bring him nearer. And he would be with her very soon.

She was greeted with the announcement that during her absence all the pictures of female ancestors had been removed from the walls and stored in the attic.

"I should have thought of it sooner," the housekeeper said. "They just stared at you all the time. No wonder—" her speech broke off.

Leona shivered. Was Mrs. Graham beginning to think that she was going mad? Was she being kind merely to humor her till Tom came—who would be someone to assume authority?

The last months had been a protracted strain, culminating in the loss of her mother and her own physical breakdown. But Leona had been thoroughly convalescent when she received the heritage of the old Purdy house. And she was certain that whatever her weakness had been, her mind was untouched.

Relief at the absence of the pictures somewhat lessened as evening drew on.

Leona began to be conscious of the similarity in the various male portraits. Like the women there was a resemblance in the arrangement of the hair. Brushed straight back, pompadour fashion, in each likeness it was worn more than usually long. She found herself trying not to look at them, yet the picture of Great-Aunt Judith's father seemed to draw her eyes.

"I shall not sleep upstairs," Leona announced as the hour for retiring came. "I—couldn't lie in that bed."

"Very well," came the quick suggestion, "how about the room I first had—in this wing? There's a big bed in it."

"That will do," the girl assented. "Tom will surely come tomorrow—and he will take me away. He'll believe me—whatever I tell him. . . . He will know that there are—dead people here!"

"I'd drink this hot milk," Mrs. Graham advised. "It helps to make you sleep."

"Sleep!" Leona shuddered. "I'm afraid to—sleep, after last night." But she drank the steaming liquid, for she was cold, with the chill that crept over her at sundown in that house.

"We'll leave the light," the housekeeper said, "and I shall stay right with you."

**F**OR the first time it occurred vaguely to the girl that it was odd for this strange woman to take so deep an interest in her, to be willing to stay in so lonely a dwelling under the conditions prevailing. Even if she herself held no belief in spirits or the supernatural, it could not be pleasant to endure the existing situation. Other questions knocked dully at the doors of Leona's mind—but her senses were growing heavy—and she welcomed the state which deprived her of thought and feeling. Her eyelids fell, shutting out the brilliantly lighted room.

The interlude of peace was broken into



by the odor that tortured her nostrils. It awakened her. It brought back the horrors of those other nights. In that minute she knew that she should have run from the old house—she should not have been restrained by fear that she would be called insane because she fled from a haunted place. These things were clear to her mind in the flash of time before her eyelids lifted. Then she saw. . . . what stood beside the bed.

Her heart was riven by the awfulness of that awakening, the devastating horror of the thing that looked down upon her. . . .

Thick hair was combed back in a pompadour from the bony forehead. Lipless jaws grinned; black, eyeless sockets stared at her. Yet—far back within them, seemed to be flame formed of yellow flecks, flame that scorched her flesh. Mouldering garments hung on the bony frame, garments like those in the picture of Great-Aunt Judith's father.

Leona did not scream. Paralysis held her throat. Only the horrible crawling and shrinking of her flesh told her that she was alive.

The thing that must once have been a man, bent forward. Arms in the mouldered sleeves went out to her. The ice of their touch froze to the very marrow of her bones. She was lifted from the bed, borne to the door.

Leona could not close her eyes. She could not move. Thought was beyond achievement. She could only stare with tortured eyes that would not close.

Into the hall they went. It was flooded with light. Advancing with a rigid, awful step was the dead woman who had sat in Great-Aunt Judith's room. On the stairs was the clothed figure with the skeleton face. The foul odor of decay weighted the air.

The other two moved at the side of the thing that carried Leona. And they went

into the parlor. In its center they halted, under the blazing chandelier. All the pictures of the female ancestors were suspended from the walls. And their eyes were glowing, horridly, from the canvas.

Suddenly the rigid arms tightened about Leona. The head bent towards her face, bony jaws approaching her lips. She felt their pressure.

Vibrant with agony, wild with the insanity of fear, rang the scream that burst from Leona's livid lips. Again and again that shriek of unearthly terror shattered the night silence. And again and again that gruesome, skeleton mouth came down to hers.

Hideous laughter came from the figure with pallid flesh.

Then there was a crash like the crack of doom. Cold air rushed through the house. Steps pounded through the hall. As they reached the parlor threshold, the lights went out.

"Leona!" a voice shouted.

"Go away!" she shrieked frenziedly. "Away from the House of Dead people! They've got me—don't let them get you!"

But the steps did not halt. They came on through the darkness. Leona was released with a suddenness that let her fall to the floor. She lay with face pressed against the polished boards, listening to the mad battle that raged about her.

They were fighting—the dead people who lived in the old house. They were fighting Tom—Tom who had come to rescue her.

Leona moaned in wordless agony. Then she felt that death had come to her. She, too, was cold and rigid. Feeling ceased and she lay motionless.

Nor could she believe that she still lived, that Tom's arms were about her. Trembling, her forehead clammy, heart beating sluggishly in her breast, she lay in his embrace, scarcely seeing his face bent above her.

"Leona—you must listen—believe me. There are no dead people here—except the body Talbot Rhone must've brought. And this skeleton dressed in woman's clothing. You're alive—and so am I! *Alive, I say!*"

When he finally compelled her to look about the room now revealed by the light he had turned on, she saw Talbot Rhone lying unconscious from a blow Tom had delivered. He was clothed in tattered, mouldy garments, a contrivance like a bony mask over his face.

She looked no further. Never again would she gaze on those horrors that had so nearly cost her reason.

Her message had brought Tom in time. Outside the house he had heard her scream, bursting down the door to get to her. And the plot was easily solved, in the light of calm reasoning. Talbot Rhone had been ably seconded by his ally, Mrs. Graham. A woman's dead body from the morgue, a skeleton, an opiate in Leona's milk to keep her asleep while they laid preparations, a hypodermic once—to hold her in oblivion. It had been cruelly easy to plot against the girl. So easily might she have been driven to actual insanity. So nearly did the plot work out.

"Dead people are worse than ghosts!" she whispered, clinging to Tom as she left the old Purdy house forever.

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