

SUPER-SCIENCE

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BIRTH OF A MONSTER

by RICHARD STARK

Those ghastly ghouls that have escaped the grave by feeding on a diet of blood from the living are the deadly enemies of all mankind, the unholy vampires

HE was sound asleep when the phone rang. He woke up, suddenly and completely, between the first and second rings, and lay with his eyes open, staring at the ceiling above him in the darkness, wondering why he had awakened.

The phone jangled again. Reaching out, he fumbled for the chain on the lamp beside his bed, found it, blinked at the sudden yellow light. The alarm clock said just past two thirty. By the third ring, he was sitting beside the bed, pawing with his toes for his slippers.

He left the bedroom, walked down the dark hall toward the dining room, promising himself yet again that he would definitely see about having an ex-

tension phone put in the bedroom. After all, a doctor, general practitioner—although it had been over three months since he had last been called so late. An emergency, that time. A drunken husband, a long, narrow flight of stairs—four bones broken and an hysterical wife.

He wondered what it would be this time. As the fourth ring began, he picked up the phone, said, "Doctor Lamming."

It was a man's voice. He didn't sound at all excited. "Doctor, my wife is about to have a baby. There's no time to get to the hospital. I have no car. If you could come—"

He didn't recognize the voice, couldn't remember any pregnancies due for two or three weeks yet. He said, "Is



your wife one of my patients?"

There was a pause, then, "No," said the voice. "We just moved in, we're new in town. Can you come?"

"Certainly. What's the address?"

"Four fifty two Larchmont. At the top of the hill."

"The old estate?"

"Yes. We've just moved in."

"I'll be there in half an hour. Maybe less."

"Thank you, doctor."

He hung up, hurried back to the bedroom and dressed. He knew the estate, at the end of Larchmont Road. Empty for years. He hadn't known anyone had moved in. Who would want to move in there? Artists, perhaps. Thinking the place was "quaint". Probably planning to renovate, modernize, surprise their friends from the city. More and more commuters were moving into town, and a lot of them had strange tastes.

The office was in the front of the house. He stopped and loaded the bag, hurried out, leaving the cabinet doors open in the dark house behind him.

His car was in the garage. He climbed in, backed out to

the street, left the garage open and hurried across town.

Larchmont Drive was a long, winding road, flanked by old gabled structures and new ranch-style one-story homes, the meeting of old and new, the locals and the commuters. The road wound and wiggled its way up the hill, ending at the great closed gates to the estate. If the estate had once had a name, once been associated with one particular owner, the name was now lost and forgotten. The brooding building at the top of the hill was now known only as "the estate". Not even a capital letter. It didn't even attract children, it didn't even have a reputation for being haunted. It was only a lonely and empty shell, stuck away on the top of the hill. Its walls were gray-black from lack of paint, its front windows, facing west, shone orange in the late afternoon, but were dull black the rest of the time.

Doctor Lamming drove up the road, noticing that the huge wrought-iron gates were open now, for the first time in his memory. He drove through and

on up the curving, pitted road to the estate.

There was no light. He got out of the car, holding his leather bag, and looked at the place, wondering if this call were only some practical joker's impractical idea of a joke. Then he saw a light moving within the house, and the heavy front door whined open.

There was a man there, holding in his hand a kerosene lamp. He said, "Doctor Lamming?"

"Yes. Coming." He trotted up the warped steps and across the rail-less pillared verandah to the door.

THE man was short and thin and sallow. He might have been thirty, or forty, or fifty. His hair was black and straight and rather long, and his face was long and thin, with prominent cheek-bones, deep-set eyes and thin, bloodless lips. The thin lips smiled slightly and he said, "We just moved in. No electricity as yet."

"Water?"

"Yes. We have our own well. My wife is upstairs."

It was the first time Doctor

Lamming had ever been inside the building. The weak kerosene lamp showed very little, but he caught glimpses, as they moved down the wide central hall to the staircase, of high-ceilinged, barren rooms, of occasional pieces of ancient, dust-covered, sheet-draped furniture, of curtainless windows and silence and emptiness.

The other man said, "Our furniture hasn't come yet. Most of it. Just enough for the one bedroom."

Doctor Lamming noticed, now, a faint, undecipherable accent in the other man's speech. He couldn't quite place it. He said, "By the way. I don't know your name."

The other stopped at the foot of the staircase and turned, his right hand extended. "I'm terribly sorry, Doctor. I'm not thinking straight. Cargill is my name. Anton Cargill."

They shook hands, and Doctor Lamming was surprised at the coldness and thinness of Cargill's hand. And, too, though Cargill claimed he wasn't thinking straight, though he claimed his wife

was upstairs, about to give birth, the man's voice and manner and tone were completely blank, completely unemotional.

Cargill turned away and climbed the stairs to the second floor, the doctor behind him. At thirty two, with six years of general practice behind him, Doctor Lamming considered himself reasonably used to the vagaries and variety of human beings, but this complete lack of emotion from an expectant father was something new. He said, "Your first child, Mr. Cargill?"

They had reached the top of the stairs, and Cargill led the way to the left. "Yes," he said. "As a matter of fact, it came as something of a surprise. We had been under the impression that it was—impossible for us."

"It sometimes takes a while," said the doctor.

Cargill walked into the bedroom, and the doctor followed. There were already three kerosene lamps in the room. The furniture was old-fashioned, massive-looking, chests and dressers and chairs and, in the center of the room, a huge canopy bed. The woman lay on the

bed, her eyes closed, her black hair spread out against the pillow, her face as pale and white as her husband's in the light of the lamps. The doctor put his bag down on the table beside the bed, and the woman groaned, moving her head.

Cargill stood beside the bed, looking without expression at his wife. "Soon now, I think," he said.

"Yes," said the doctor. "If you would—towels, hot water. Lots of both."

"Of course," said Cargill. Taking one of the lamps, he left the room.

The woman on the bed was undoubtedly in labor. She groaned again, and murmured, but Doctor Lamming couldn't make out what she had said. He stripped the blanket away, and saw that Cargill had been right. Soon now. He took his tools from the bag, wrapped in a towel, spread them out on a table, his own stainless steel equipment, the two silver scalpels that had been his father's, that he now carried more as good luck charms than anything else, memories of his father, who had been the Doctor

Lamming in the town before him, and in whose footsteps he had striven to walk.

The woman was in pain. He worked rapidly, not noticing the odd, the strange, the unbelievable, not noticing anything but the work he was doing. The baby didn't seem to want to be born. It was difficult, it was long and exhausting, but finally he held the infant in his hands. The child breathed, it weakly moved its chubby fists, but it did not cry out.

He set the child down and stared. He had been working with such absorption, had been so blind to everything aside from his own movements and the movements of the child, that now he could do nothing but stare, with shock and disbelief.

It had been a bloodless birth. A birth completely without blood. And now, as he stared with horror at the woman's face, her eyes closed and her mouth open as she lay in exhausted sleep, he knew what this woman was. He looked at the sharp, pointed teeth, the long, fang-like canines, the pale lips, the chalk-white face, and

he knew just what she was.

And what he had to do. The furniture in the room was old, some of it was beaten and rickety. He grabbed a chair, wrenched at it, managed to pull one of the slats out of the back. He reached for a knife, one of the delicate instruments of his profession, he hacked at the slat of wood until one end of it was sharp and pointed. Turning, he closed his eyes and plunged the wooden stake into the sleeping woman's heart.

She moved, with a sudden lurching spasm, her cold arms beating against his face, and from her throat came the scream of the banshee, the scream of the doomed in Hell. He fell away from her, lost his balance, toppled to the floor. Rising, he saw that she was still, and that she was incredibly old.

He had to get away. He turned to the door, and Cargill was standing there, in one hand the kerosene lamp, in the other a handful of folded towels.

They stared at each other, and Cargill's eyes seemed to be alight with passion, with rage, with obscene lust.

Doctor Lamming backed away, bumping into the table on which lay his bag and his tools. He stared at the other with loathing and fear. "Vampire!" he screamed, and his voice echoed through the empty rooms of the house.

Cargill set down the lamp, dropped the towels on the floor. "Yes," he said. "A new world. *Our* new world, too. You'll never know how difficult it was to make the crossing. To a new world, where we are not hunted, where we are not known, where we are safe."

"You are known," the doctor told him. "You are not safe."

"Known only as legend." Cargill looked without emotion at the bed. "You have killed my wife," he said. "But I will have a new wife. And first I will have a new brother."

The doctor backed away again, around the table, clutching at the bag on the table, wondering if he could hurl the bag, duck, run around the man—the vampire—the *thing* before him, down the stairs, to safety.

"The gates are closed," Cargill told him. "You are mine."

And his arms moved up, above his head. But, no, his arms were stretched out, toward the doctor, and he rose, to the beat of dusty black wings, to swoop down upon the doctor.

The doctor screamed and pawed at the table. His father's scalpels! His hand touched one of them, and he brought it up, a glinting silver blade, and as the hungry mouth lunged down at him he pushed the blade deep into the other's neck.

Cargill slumped before him, clutching the doctor's coat, gasping oaths in a language the doctor had never before heard, and the doctor swung once more with the silver scalpel, driving it deep into Cargill's chest. Cargill screamed, and the monstrous wings fluttered, and the vampire lay dead.

Doctor Lamming staggered from the room. He had to get away, he had to get help, he had to call the police, there might be more of them here, more of them. In the darkness, without the lamp to guide him, he stumbled and ran along the upper hall, clattered and lurched and half-fell down the broad staircase, ran panting to

the front door and to his car.

The car started at the first try. He turned it around, backing, turning, then pressed the accelerator to the floor and the car leaped ahead, to race around the curving driveway to the road.

The gates were closed, as Cargill had said. He hit the brakes, shoving downward with his foot, and the car squealed and swerved to a stop inches

from the gates. He got out of the car, ran to the gates, pushed on them, and they started to open.

Something brushed his face. He turned and looked up, and it hovered just above him, its tiny dusky wings beating silently, and then it plunged and Doctor Lamming screamed his life away.

The baby.

THE END