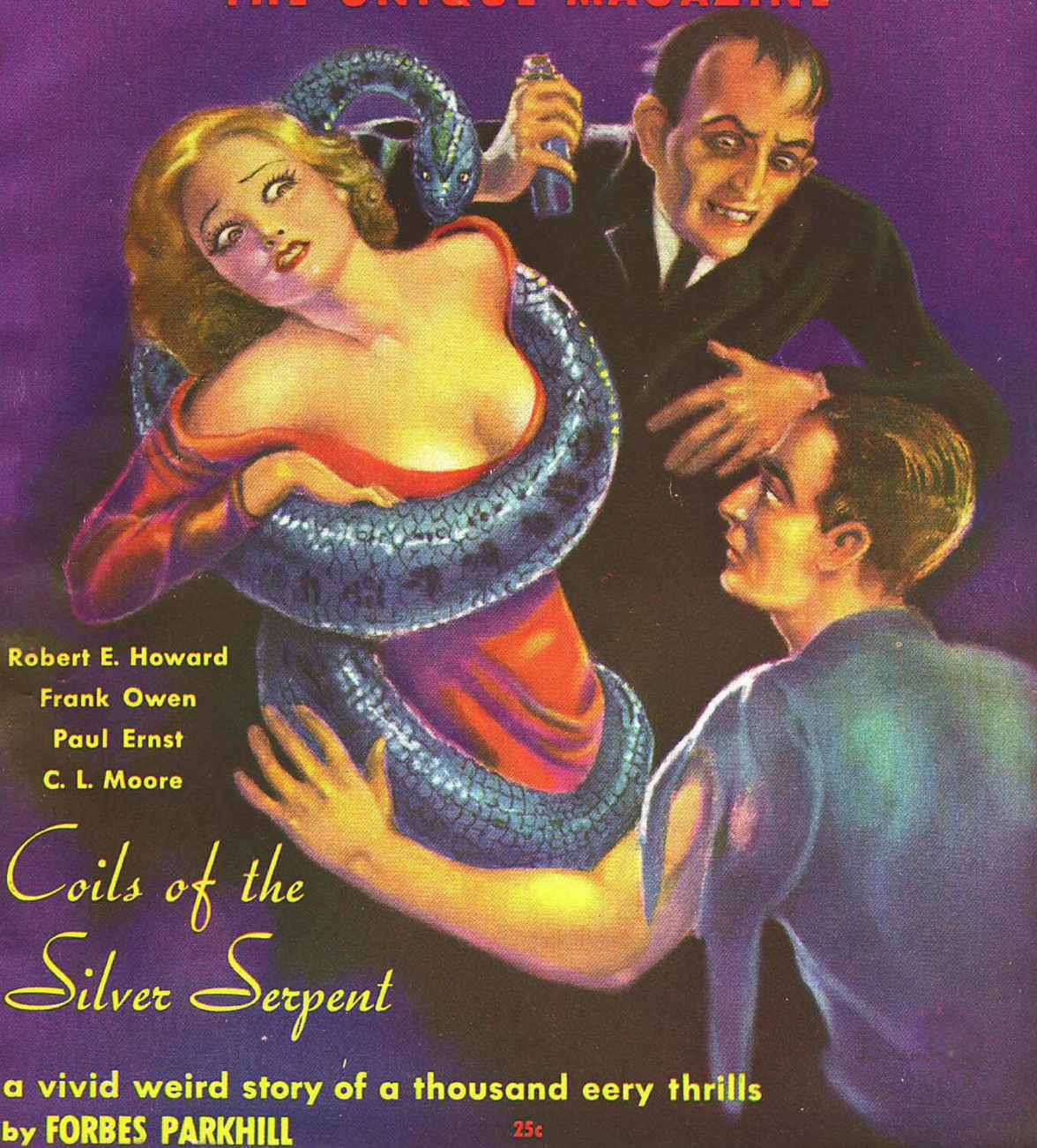


Weird Tales

FEB.

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE



Robert E. Howard
Frank Owen
Paul Ernst
C. L. Moore

*Coils of the
Silver Serpent*

a vivid weird story of a thousand eery thrills
by **FORBES PARKHILL**

25c

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Coils of the Silver Serpent

By FORBES PARKHILL

A horrifying terror-tale of a gigantic anaconda and a murderous biologist—a story of a thousand thrills

1. Trail of Terror

UTTER terror was in the muffled shriek that arose from the penthouse. A man's scream. Blood-chilling. The despairing, horror-laden cry of one face to face with an appalling, frightful death.

It brought Patrolman Barry McClave bounding into action. He had been crouching, his ear at the keyhole of the door opening upon the roof from the stairway leading from the floor below—the last elevator stop.

Barry snapped erect. He spat on his hands, and his blue eyes sparkled with eagerness for battle as he whipped forth his automatic. He yanked the door open. Through the darkness he dashed across the roof of the twenty-eight story apartment building, toward the penthouse. Excitement and exertion sent the blood pounding through his veins. His florid face became beet-red. He cried:

"Man, oh man! What a break! And me little more'n a rookie! What'll Adell say when she hears——"

The blood-curdling scream cut him short. Without changing his grip on the weapon, he hammered on the penthouse door with the butt of the automatic.

"Open up, there! It's the law! Open up, you——"

The knob turned under his left hand. The door was unlocked. He kicked it

open. That fearful, harrowing shriek burst upon him with piercing intensity.

He plunged forward. He failed to see the little, brown, monkey-like man behind the door, for his attention was fixed upon the figure dead ahead. A man; a man in evening clothes; a man with a pointed Vandyke beard; a short man, pot-bellied; a man wearing high, Cuban heels.

Oddly, it was the high heels that impressed Barry as he burst through the door. For the man had been facing the library on the left of the reception hall, and merely turned his head as Barry lunged in.

The young patrolman yelled:

"Where is Mr. Trehearne? Man, what are you doing to——"

And then his question was answered, not by the short man with the high heels, but by Salisbury Trehearne himself. Trehearne, the wealthy, elderly broker who lived alone in an apartment on the eighteenth floor—whose uneasy look and whose half-expressed feeling of dread had led the officer on the beat to follow him here to the penthouse apartment of Doctor Cloxton Vroom, the zoologist.

Trehearne came staggering backward through the library door. Coiled about him from knees to shoulders was a gigantic, silver serpent, an immense, thirty-foot anaconda, giant among reptiles! Its scaly hide was a leprous silver, glowing with faint phosphorescence.



"The giant snake was almost on his heels as he reached the corner."

One of Trehearne's arms was pinned against his side by the gigantic serpent's coils. With the other he pounded, clawed and scratched at the armor-like scales of the monster.

Never had Barry seen such an expression of stark terror on a man's face. Every vestige of color was drained from his cheeks. His eyes seemed about to burst from their sockets—whether from horror or pressure, Barry could not tell. His head was thrown far back. His mouth was open wide. From his throat came

that heart-sickening shriek—weaker now than a moment since.

FOR an instant Barry was paralyzed with astonishment. An involuntary chill coursed up his spine. A musty, sickening odor pervaded the apartment.

"Help!" shrieked Trehearne hoarsely. "For God's sake, help me!"

The screaming plea brought Barry back to his senses. He raised his automatic.

Doctor Cloxton Vroom, the pot-bellied zoologist in the high heels, was gloating.

His eyes, so pale they were almost colorless, were opened wide. Thin lips were drawn back from white teeth. Oddly enough, despite his pot-paunch, Vroom's cheeks were sunken, almost haggard. He spat:

"So! Trehearne, you played for time—too long!"

Vroom was unarmed. At the moment, he seemed in the grip of some sort of hypnosis, for he evidenced no fear of the officer or his weapon.

Barry trained his pistol on the squirming, twisting, silvery folds of the monster reptile. But the instant he was ready to fire, the serpent had twisted with its prey. The steel-jacketed bullet would have pierced Trehearne's body, as well as the serpent's.

Barry dared not fire. The silvery ananconda's head was arched, weaving back and forth in front of Trehearne's eyes. Barry saw its powerful folds constrict.

An explosive gasp came from Trehearne's mouth as the last bit of breath was squeezed from his lungs. Barry heard two or three short, sharp little reports, as of twigs snapping. He knew it was the bones of Trehearne's pinioned arm, and perhaps his ribs, breaking under the terrific pressure.

Suddenly Trehearne went limp. His jaw sagged, his head fell lolling back. His free arm dangled loose. His knees buckled. Serpent and man plopped to the floor.

Barry whirled on the zoologist.

"You—you devil!" he exploded. "Get that—that thing off of Trehearne—man, do you hear me?—before I kill you!"

He leveled his automatic. From the corner of his eye he could see the jaws of the monstrous silver serpent distending—distending tremendously. He had read that such reptiles could swallow an ox easily. He shuddered. Was this fearful reptile about to—

Cloxtton Vroom went white. He leaped sidewise, behind a huge, Indian pottery vase. His colorless eyes shot past Barry. They rested upon the little, brown, monkey-like man behind the door.

"Cariaco!" he bleated appealingly. "Kill him, Cariaco!"

The little monkey-man snatched a machete from the wall. He bounded toward Barry like a spider-monkey leaping from tree to tree.

Barry whirled, just as the machete descended. Primal instinct led him to throw up his arm to protect himself, rather than to send a bullet into the little brown man.

Cariaco's arm glanced off the patrolman's. Instead of the edge, the flat of the blade descended glancingly, shearing away Barry's cap and striking him upon the skull.

The pistol dropped from his fingers. He pitched forward upon the thick carpet. He was still semi-conscious, but the blow from the machete had sapped his strength. Through the ringing in his ears he could hear Vroom saying:

"So! It is well, Cariaco! . . . Tie him up, so! Swiftly, swiftly, Cariaco, while I drive this beast back to its cage!"

Barry was conscious that the little monkey-like brown man was lashing his ankles and wrists. He tried to struggle, but his sinews refused to respond to the lash of his will. He was dazed, partly unconscious, and incapable of protecting himself.

He could hear the tap of Vroom's high heels as the pot-bellied zoologist sped into the library. And then, a moment later, shouts and stamping.

"Back! . . . Away, you demon from hell! . . . Back to your cage, you silver rascal! . . . So! You would, would you? Take that!"

Barry's brain was beginning to clear. He opened his eyes. He was on his back. On a stand just above him he saw a de-

canter. He longed for a stiff swig from the decanter. His lips were fearfully dry. He rolled his head sidewise.

There, on the floor, lay a shapeless thing, a formless something, within the clothing of a man—Trehearne's clothing. The trunk was elongated. Barry blinked. But it had Trehearne's head.

Barry's stomach suddenly went cold and roily. He rolled his head to the other side. There was Vroom, stamping his high heels and shouting, as he drove the gigantic silver serpent back from its prey. The reptile was weaving and darting. Vroom lunged and struck at it with a red-hot poker.

"Back!" he shouted, and stamped. "Back, I tell you!"

BARRY saw the immense serpent swing swiftly sidewise. With a movement almost as swift as lightning, its blunt head shot past the stamping zoologist. Its scaly body slithered and scraped across the floor.

"So!" croaked Vroom savagely. "So! You want your supper, eh? . . . Take that! . . . I'll show you who's master here! . . . So!"

The glowing poker slashed through the air. It swished across the serpent's thick body, some six feet below its head.

A little curl of blue smoke arose from the scaly, silver form. Instantly the serpent was transformed into a thrashing, writhing mass. A sickening odor of burning flesh became perceptible.

Barry gazed, fascinated.

The writhing, tortured serpent twisted itself into a knot. But when, an instant later, it uncoiled, it was farther back, away from Vroom. It reared its head high, always facing the man with the glowing poker. And Barry could see, alongside the searing mark of the red-hot iron, a dozen other similar, but older scars.

Vroom shouted, "Back!" and stamped again. Barry wondered why he stamped. He was unaware that the tympanum is lacking in a serpent's ear—that it cannot hear, but that it is sensitive to the vibrations produced by stamping.

For a moment man and snake battled, like two fencers, but always the serpent was losing ground. Thrice Vroom lunged at the reptile with the glowing iron. Thrice the monster evaded the thrust with the swiftness of lightning. Then the two vanished through the library door.

Abruptly Barry was conscious that every muscle in his body was taut. As he realized the significance of the zoologist's battle with the reptile—that the man was driving it back to prevent it from devouring Trehearne's body, from swallowing it whole—he was gripped by a sudden nausea.

Things began to swim again before his eyes. He closed his lids. The last thing he saw was Cariaco, the little brown monkey-man. Cariaco was eyeing him speculatively and testing the edge of his machete with his thumb.

The next thing he heard was Vroom's croaking voice:

"So! You did well, Cariaco. . . . What? No, no, my boy—put that machete down! Do not kill him, unless he tries to escape!"

Barry took a deep breath. He opened his eyes. As loudly as he could, he belted, three times:

"Help!"

Vroom smiled, and fingered his pointed Vandyke.

"So? . . . And who will hear you, my dear officer? . . . Twenty-eight stories up, you must remember. And sound does not go down easily. Roar all you please. And then, tell me how you came to be in wait at my door!"

Barry swallowed.

"Go to hell!" he snapped.

2. *Twenty-Eight Floors Up*

"So?" Vroom was playing with his pointed beard. "Tough, eh? I—and my pet—can make the hardest turn gentle. Ask Cariaco."

Barry shuddered. But he was not to be bluffed. He hadn't been on the force long. But he knew the fear inspired by the shield he wore, and his uniform. He knew better than to let himself be placed on the defensive. So long as he represented the law, he must for ever take the aggressive, carry the battle to the other fellow, never admit he was licked. Hard to do, when one was bound hand and foot, but not wholly impossible.

"Man, why did you murder Trehearne?" he demanded commandingly.

"Murder?"

Vroom's voice sounded now like a cat's purr.

"Murder? My dear officer—you witnessed it yourself. The serpent killed Trehearne, not I!"

"You made no move to halt it!" Barry burst out impetuously, and shuddered. "You could have saved him, man. And you didn't!"

Vroom shrugged.

"Opinion, my dear officer—merely a matter of your opinion. Cariaco and I will swear we did our utmost to save my dear friend and patron, Salisbury Trehearne."

"Man alive!" Barry gave a noticeable start. "Now I remember. I read it in the papers. He was going to finance your expedition to Samarkand or Timbuctoo or somewhere."

"To the headwaters of the Orinoco and Amazon," Vroom corrected with an evil grin; "whence came our silvery pet, who so unfortunately escaped from his cage just now. So. You know a lot for an ordinary police officer—perhaps too much."

"I know Trehearne left you a half-million dollars in his will, to finance future expeditions!" Barry burst forth impetuously. "I read it in the papers."

The zoologist fingered his Vandyke beard. His colorless eyes narrowed to mere slits as he gazed speculatively at his prisoner.

"Too much," he mused. "You know too much, my friend—too much!"

He turned to the little monkey-like servant. "The doors, Cariaco. See that none of this policeman's companions are outside. So!"

Cariaco bobbed like a jumping-jack. "*Si, si, Jefe!*"

"A marvelous servant, Cariaco," said Vroom. "Always does as he is told. Never talks too much. In fact, it was from him I first procured the secret of the silver serpent. A full-blooded Onote Indian, is Cariaco, though they say the race is extinct."

Barry was straining at his bonds. They would not give an inch. He was in a tough spot, and he knew it. He decided his best course was to stall for time. Thing to do was to keep this pot-bellied little fiend in evening clothes talking until—well, until something happened.

"The secret of the silver serpent?" he prompted.

Vroom pursed his lips, frowned, fingered his pointed beard.

"'Twill do no harm," he muttered, to himself. "Because, within half-an hour——"

He chopped off his sentence suddenly, and began another.

"I am a zoologist. You know what is a zoologist?"

"Sure. A guy that works for the zoo."

Vroom smiled. "So? Sometimes, yes. I was on an expedition to the interior of Venezuela when I met Cariaco. I was seeking some specimens of the huge anaconda, among other reptilia, and——"

Barry interrupted. "I thought they were kind of green, or something."

"In their wild state, yes—with a double row of large, oval, black spots on the back. But this—my pet—has lived for three years inside a trunk, my friend. In darkness. Bleached out. You see, he eats a—well, let us say, a meal—and then he sleeps six months until he is hungry again."

Barry shuddered. "You were talking about Cariaco."

"So! To be sure. The other natives told me there was just one man who could always catch the giant devil-snake—Cariaco. He possessed magic power over the reptiles, they said. They even devoured all his enemies, if he commanded."

"Hooley!" snorted Barry.

"Not hooley," insisted Vroom. "I found it was the truth. Not magic, but a rare potion he carried in an Indian vial of clay. A potion that has an effect upon these huge anaconda much like catnip has upon the cat family. It attracts them powerfully and, unless they are already gorged, stimulates their appetite tremendously."

"Oh, yeah?" demanded Barry sarcastically.

"Cariaco would place some of the substance upon a lamb. The lamb would be staked a short distance from the water's edge, as bait. The anaconda would be attracted. When he had swallowed the lamb he would become sluggish, and unable to move quickly. The natives would pounce upon him with lassoes—so!"

"Well, what of it?" Barry was prodding him on, stalling for time.

"Only this, my friend. Cariaco used it also to rid himself of his enemies. He would place some of the substance upon the clothing of the enemy. The odor is almost indistinguishable to a human being. The first time the enemy approached

the water's edge, at night—pouf! He vanished! So!"

"That musty, sickening odor I noticed when I first came in?" asked Barry, and Vroom nodded and went on:

"'Twas the truth. I know. My companion on the expedition, a surly fellow, immensely rich, who was financing the trip, carried a huge amount of cash, but would spend none of it. I grew to hate him. So I anointed his clothing with Cariaco's snake potion. That night Ruth-erford Giblin went down to the water's edge—and never came back!"

BARRY cried out in horror at Vroom's calm recital. "You—you murdered him? Man, you mean to say, you let him be devoured by a snake?"

Vroom smiled. He was immensely pleased with himself.

"My knowledge opened up a whole world of pleasing possibilities, my friend. I brought Cariaco and a living specimen of the anaconda back with me on my yacht."

"Your yacht?"

"I forgot to tell you, my friend. I bought the yacht with the money Giblin should have spent, but didn't. But it takes money to support a yacht. A year later I was nearing the end of my resources. I cultivated the acquaintance of Jakob Pfrimmer, the wealthy old——"

Barry interrupted. "I know. The rich old jewel merchant, who disappeared a year ago, with a hundred thousand dollars worth of diamonds. Man, oh man, what I'd give to work on a case like that!"

Vroom fingered his beard and sighed.

"After all, a hundred thousand dollars doesn't go very far when one has a yacht like mine to support. Have you seen it, down at pier number——"

Barry interrupted with a cry of horror.

"You fiend! You placed that ointment on his clothing, so your ghastly silver

snake would crush him—eat him alive!"

"I assure you," said Vroom seriously, "that Pfrimmer was quite crushed to death before the serpent swallowed him. A convenient way of doing away with a person—no? Guns, knives, poisons—they all leave embarrassing traces. But my serpent murders—they destroy the victim without leaving a trace. Swallow the corpus delicti, as it were. Clever. No?"

Barry gritted his teeth as he strove to control himself.

"You admit it! You murdered Jakob Pfrimmer! Just like you murdered Salisbury Trehearne just now! . . . Cloxton Vroom, I place you under arrest for murder!"

Vroom smiled faintly as he regarded Barry's bonds significantly. He was toying with the policeman's captured automatic.

"So? I'm under arrest; *you're* telling *me!* You, unarmed, bound, helpless, place *me* under arrest!"

He broke into a harsh, grating laugh.

"Man, I'm not speaking for myself," glowered Barry. "I'm representing the law." He decided upon a desperate bluff. "This place is surrounded. There is an officer at every door. You haven't a chance, Vroom, you——"

The zoologist clapped his hands. Cariaco popped out of a door like a monkey on a stick. Vroom looked at him questioningly, brows lifted.

"No, no, *mi Jefe.*" The little brown man shook his head. "No policemen."

Vroom smirked, plucked his beard, and glanced at Barry with a sidewise glance, mockingly.

"Why lie, my friend? Why not tell the truth, for a change? If you know what is best for you, you will tell me how you came to be at my door, just now. . . . Talk!"

Barry talked.

"Man, I'm talking true," he said. "Trehearne passed me on the street down below, while I was walking my beat. Seemed worried about something. Asked me what I knew about you. Told me he was going up to your penthouse. Asked me how quick I could answer an emergency call on my beat."

Vroom scowled fiercely.

"So! And you——?"

"I asked him if he needed help. He said no, but that I might stand by. After he'd gone I got to thinking about what he said, and everything. Figured maybe I oughta tail him, and find out what was what. If everything was okay, he needn't know. If it wasn't . . . Well, I was at the door when I heard him yell. That's all."

The zoologist's lip curled in a crooked snarl. But he said nothing. It was Barry who spoke.

"No, that isn't all. I just remembered something. Something you forgot. Man, you didn't tell me why you drove the silver serpent away after it had crushed Trehearne to death."

He was mystified by the enigmatic smile of his pot-bellied captor.

"Perhaps," purred Vroom, like a cat playing with a mouse, "it was because I forgot."

"I don't get you." Barry frowned. "But I do know this, fella: it was the fooliest stunt you ever pulled in your life! If the snake had swallowed Trehearne's body, there would have been nothing left to fasten the crime on you. You said it yourself—the serpent swallowed the corpuscle delicious, or whatever it is. How'll you explain Trehearne's body, found here in your apartment?"

"Perhaps," Vroom smiled, "it will not be found in my apartment. But—no matter. . . . Cariaco!"

"*Si, si, mi Jefe!*" answered the native, bounding forward, monkey-like.

"The vial, Cariaco!"

"*Si, si, mi jefe.* Here it is."

Vroom took from the servant's hand a squat, bulbous clay vial, marked with Indian characters in black and yellow. He held it aloft, as if it might have been a slender wine-glass. He withdrew the stopper. He sniffed. The apartment was filled with the musty, faintly sickening odor Barry had noticed at first.

The zoologist stepped to Barry's side. He tipped the vial. Drop by drop a murky green liquid fell upon Barry's uniform. A chill of terror coursed through his veins. Screaming words burst from pallid lips.

"Good Lord, man—what are you doing?"

Vroom smirked. "Now you see why I refused to let the serpent devour Trehearne. I dare not let you escape, my friend. I can dispose of Trehearne's body otherwise. But yours must be destroyed without a trace. By the serpent!"

3. *Without a Trace*

THEY don't make 'em any braver than Patrolman Barry McClave. Barry had swapped lead with the Baxter Street mob, and never batted an eyelash or gave an inch. But this was something else. It's easy enough to face death when you're standing on your two feet, slug-slinging with a foe whose bullet may blot you out, swift and sure—like that! But to face Trehearne's fate—to know that you're going to be slowly crushed to death in the slimy folds of a monstrous reptile; to know your bones will pop and snap and crumble beneath the constrictive power of the gigantic snake; to know you are fated to vanish slowly, head first down that gigantic maw—ah, buddy, if you can face that without the quiver of a lip, you're a man!

Barry didn't want to die. Life was

sweet to him—awfully sweet. But in that terrible moment he knew that death, too, can be sweet—if only it is swift and certain!

His face, so recently flushed and florid, was sapped of its color. His lips were blue. He was on the verge of utter, unreasoning panic, when one forgets his manhood—everything!

It was the shield, glistening on the blue background of his uniform, that brought him around with clenched teeth. It would not let him forget he represented the Law. The Law doesn't squeal, doesn't whine. The men who wear that badge may die, but they die like men. They go down fighting. They know how to take it.

"I'll show 'em!" he muttered to himself. "If it's in the cards that this is to be the kind of an end I draw—well, I'll play 'em as they lay!"

For a moment he was on the verge of begging Vroom to send a bullet through his brain before he allowed the serpent to devour him. But he bit his lip to keep himself from begging. After all, the agony would last only a minute or so. He could stand it. He'd show 'em!

"Take it out, Cariaco. . . . So!"

Barry heard Vroom's voice as from a distance. The pot-bellied creature in the evening clothes was motioning toward Trehearne's crushed body with Barry's pistol.

The little brown man tugged at the shapeless form, but it was all he could do to move it. His master pocketed the pistol and laid hold of the body. Together they dragged it through the outer door.

With every atom of his strength Barry strained at his lashings. They did not give an inch. Barry knew, then, that he could never break them. He relaxed with a groan.

Was this to be the end, then? Was he to wait supinely until the repulsive

Vroom returned, to loose the monstrous serpent upon him? Was there nothing he could do?

Like an inspiration, it came to him—the solution of his difficulty. He rolled over, kicked and wriggled through the door of the library. Sure enough—there it was—the poker with which Vroom had driven the loathsome reptile back to its cage. It was thrust back into the glowing grate fire, heating anew.

Barry rolled over, and kicked at it with his bound feet. It fell out upon the hearth, the tip glowing red. He flopped over upon it, backward, so that the ropes would fall across the red-hot tip.

He flinched as the searing metal touched his flesh. But an instant later he felt the ropes fall apart. He flung himself sidewise, his arms free at last.

A moment more, and he had loosed the bonds on his ankles. He staggered to his feet, his nerves aquiver. For an instant he stood, dully looking at the seared flesh where the poker had touched his wrist. He was conscious that his hand was trembling violently.

He stumbled through the library door, hunting for a weapon. Vroom had his automatic, and Cariaco had taken the machete.

"Man, oh man!" he exclaimed, the nervous reaction causing his voice to tremble, "I'm so shaky I couldn't shoot a gar straight if I had one! If I only had a good shot of——"

He broke off as his eyes fell on the decanter. He up-ended it and swallowed gulp after gulp of the fiery liquor. Then he broke for the door.

"Man, I haven't the chance of a fiddler's witch if they catch me here unarmed." He opened the door cautiously, saw no one, and dashed across the dark expanse to the door opening from the stairway. "I'd be nerts to stick around and try to fight it out with 'em, and may-

be get burned down. If I can lock this door from the other side, they can't possibly get away before I can call the station."

But the door wouldn't lock from the staircase side. Barry, whose head was beginning to ring from the effects of the liquor, felt he could guard the elevators downstairs in the lobby and prevent their escape while he was summoning help.

Then the liquor got a good grip on him, and for some minutes life seemed a succession of flashes, like scenes on a movie screen, with dark intervals between.

HE DIDN'T remember going down in the elevator. But the flash registered as he leaned over the switchboard and hoarsely barked at Adell Denby:

"Headquarters, 'Dell—quick! Riot squad—hommy squad—everything they got!"

Adell Denby was blond and a knockout for looks, and she was Barry's sweetie and the swellest skirt there was.

"Barry! . . . What's the matter, pal? You look awful, Barry—like you just seen a ghost, or something! My shift's done in twenty minutes—midnight. Let me take you——"

And then the shrieking of a police siren. And the next flash found Barry out in the street, running toward the excited group clustered near the curb.

There was the emergency ambulance. Two attendants in white jackets, stooping over something on the asphalt. The milling crowd made way before Barry's uniform. He saw the attendants lifting something onto the stretcher. Something inert and shapeless. Something dressed in Salisbury Trehearne's clothing!

"D' gent took a dive," a spectator was explaining to another. "Out d' window,

see? Another case of losin' his shirt in the Street, huh?"

The explanation was seeping through Barry's consciousness.

"They threw Trehearne's body over the coping," he was telling himself, as if explaining to someone else. "Everybody will think his bones were broken by the twenty-eight story fall, instead of by the serpent!

"Man, I get it, now. I see why Vroom was willing to drive the serpent away from Trehearne's body. He knew he could dispose of the body so it would look like an accident—or a suicide leap. But he can't get away with it. Not after I tell my story."

Again the siren shrieking in his ears; the siren of the homicide squad, responding to Barry's summons, 'phoned to headquarters by Adell. A peremptory voice ringing in his ears:

"You're the officer on the beat? What happened?"

It was Jody Sparlin's voice. Sparlin, head of the hommy squad. Sparlin, the slickest dick in the city. Sparlin, who had solved half the city's murders in the last five years. Sparlin, whose exploits made the first pages right along. Barry recognized him. But to Sparlin, Barry was just another harness bull—just the flatfoot on the beat.

"Murder, sir!" Barry responded thickly, saluting. "They tossed him from the roof. C'mon—we can get 'em!"

Sparlin reached under his shoulder for his gun.

"All right, boys. Let's go!" he snapped at his aides.

A dark interval as they went up the elevator. Barry didn't even know when they dropped a detective at the floor where Trehearne had lived. The next flash—they were at the door leading to the roof.

"Man, don't take any chances!" Barry

was warning. "I know Vroom's armed. He's got my automatic. The monkey-man has a big knife. They're both desperate."

And then the rush across the roof in the darkness. And Cloxton Vroom, suave, cool, courteous, unflurried, meeting them at the door of the penthouse apartment—and inviting them in to enjoy his hospitality.

"I don't get the lay," Sparlin was barking angrily. "Speak up, Officer! Just what happened?"

Barry remembered trying to tell his fantastic, unbelievable story. Words rushing out, tumbling over each other in his eagerness to explain; words that tripped and stumbled and slid away incoherently as a result of the terrific nerve-strain he had endured, and the tremendous jolt he had taken from the decanter.

"Giant snake—crushed Trehearne to death—threw him over coping—captured me—going to make snake eat me up—that fiend—high heels—ugh!"

The boss of the hommy squad was looking at the young harness cop suspiciously.

"Doctor Vroom—will you please tell us what happened here? The officer seems a little bit—er, excited."

VROOM smiled faintly, and plucked at his immaculate Vandyke.

"Assuredly! . . . The young officer came here to notify me my Rolls had been parked too long, down below. I offered him a drink, and explained I was planning to drive it down to the pier to my yacht in a few minutes. A roadster, you know. I drive myself.

"So! I explained to him that I am a zoologist, about to embark on another trip. He hinted about the liquor in the decanter, and I, of course, gave him another drink. I am afraid I talked too long on the subject dear to my heart, and he kept helping himself to the decanter.

"He wished to see some of my specimens. I started to show him the stuffed reptiles in the case in the other room. And then he seemed to lose his head, entirely. Must have had a good many drinks before he came here. An attack of delirium, perhaps.

"He whipped out his pistol, and was going to shoot one of my prized stuffed snakes. I called Cariaco, my man, who took the weapon away from him. He stumbled down the stairs, muttering threats against me. A most pitiful case, for an officer so young and so promising."

Sparlin glared at Barry. The detective who had been dropped off at the eighteenth floor reported, saluting.

"I examined Trehearne's apartment, sir. Found an open window just above the spot where the ambulance picked up his body."

Barry was frantic as he saw Vroom wriggling out of the trap.

"He had the little monkey-man open that window—Vroom did!"

Vroom smiled indulgently, and winked at Sparlin. "The young officer ran downstairs, found the crowd gathered about the body of the suicide, Trehearne, and thought he could get even with me by blaming it upon me. . . . I wish you'd look through my apartment, to make certain there is no living serpent here—nothing but stuffed specimens!"

Sparlin grunted.

"I'll have a man look the place over. Matter of form, Doctor. . . . Officer, let me smell your breath. . . . Whew! Like a distillery!"

"But it's true!" Barry protested vehemently. "The silver serpent—tried to eat Trehearne—the monkey-man——"

"Listen, buddy." Sparlin was frowning. "You ought to have more sense than to get snozzled while you're in uniform. It'll get you busted, flat, if I turn you in to the inspector. I got a notion to

do it, too, only you're a youngster on the force. . . . Snakes, big enough to eat people up! Monkey-men! Buddy, you got the d. t.'s. You better go home and sober up."

4. *Sinister House*

BARRY didn't remember how he got back downstairs. It was another lapse, a dark interval between his flashes of consciousness. He only knew that Sparlin and the homicide squad had gone, convinced that Trehearne was a suicide who had leaped from his own window, and that the officer on the beat was drunk.

Barry didn't blame them. His story was so wildly fantastic that he could scarce expect anyone to believe it. The disturbing thought crept into his mind that perhaps that drink from the decanter had inflamed his imagination.

"Maybe—maybe Vroom was right," he muttered to himself. "Maybe I had a few drinks too many, and just imagined all that stuff about the silver serpent crushing Trehearne to death. . . . Man, oh man, I swear I'll never touch anything stronger than 3.2 as long as I live!"

The clock in the crowded lobby showed 11.56 o'clock. Which reminded Barry that Adell's trick at the switchboard was finished at midnight. He straightened his uniform, and felt of his holster. Vroom had returned his automatic to Sparlin, who had given it back to Barry reluctantly.

He started for the switchboard. He wasn't going to mention all that snake stuff to Adell. Catch him making a fool of himself again!

A dart of pain stabbed through his wrist. His eyes fell upon the long welt, searing the flesh. For a long moment he stared.

Then he cried out:

"Man alive! Imagination didn't put that burn there!"

He rushed over to the switchboard. His brain was clearing, now.

"Adell! Has Cloxton Vroom or his little monkey-man left the apartment yet?"

"I don't know, Barry. All I know is that Vroom 'phoned, just before the detectives arrived, and asked that a porter be sent up to remove a trunk, which he wanted sent down to his yacht, at the pier. It ought to be at the service entrance now."

Barry blurted out: "The silver serpent!" and grabbed his girl friend by the wrist.

"Listen, 'Dell. This is important, baby! Say, did Trehearne put a call through the switchboard from his apartment just before he—before he jumped from the window?"

"No, Barry. But he did call from Vroom's penthouse apartment just about that time. Started to ask me something, and then said, 'Pardon me,' and hung up. Like he'd been starting to 'phone, and someone came in, and——"

"Man alive!" Barry didn't even stop to thank the girl. He darted back toward the service entrance.

Cloxton Vroom and Cariaco were superintending the loading of a large trunk on an express truck. Barry snapped:

"Look here, Vroom. I got the goods on you, now. I got positive evidence from an outsider that Trehearne was in your apartment a moment before his death."

"So?" Vroom smiled. "Another attack of delirium, no?"

"If you don't believe it, go and buzz the 'phone girl—the swell-looking blond!" challenged Barry. "It's enough to send you to the hot squat!"

Vroom plucked his beard. "Pardon. I will—just to make sure you're wrong."

He disappeared. Barry was positive the serpent was in the trunk. But guesswork

gained no convictions. He wanted proof.

"Open it up, Cariaco," he told the servant.

"*Caracoles!*" exploded the little brown man. "You go jump in lake, hey?"

Barry ordered the truck-driver and the porter to hold up the loading of the truck. They were impressed by his uniform, but they knew he had no legal right to force the opening of Vroom's trunk. For several minutes they argued. Cariaco sputtered with rage. Barry was striving to keep his temper.

Barry lost the argument. The trucker and the porter started to lift the trunk to the tail-gate of the truck.

"You birds," scowled Barry, "wouldn't be so hot about handling that trunk if you knew it contained a thirty-foot snake!"

With a shriek the porter loosed his end of the trunk. It toppled from the truck to the street—and burst open.

Instantly Cariaco, with a scream of rage, whipped out a long knife and rushed at the officer.

Barry yanked out his automatic. He owed this monkey-man something—a steel-jacketed slug through the belly. And now was his chance. There were witnesses to prove he was shooting in self-defense.

"You asked for it, buddy!" he snapped, and pulled the trigger.

There was no report. In a flash Barry realized that Vroom must have unloaded the weapon before returning it.

The knife was slicing through the darkness. Barry sidestepped and he swung with his left, with all his might.

The knife slashed through his sleeve, through the flesh of his arm. But at the same instant his fist smashed home against the monkey-man's jaw like a blast of dynamite.

Barry tipped the scales at 180 pounds. The monkey-man could have weighed

little more than half as much. Something cracked when Barry's fist connected. Whether it was Cariaco's jawbone or his neck vertebræ, Barry couldn't tell. He saw the brown man spinning through the air. And then——

Then he became conscious of the terrorized shrieks of the truck-driver and the porter. He spun about. The ghastly, sinuous form of the gigantic silver serpent was emerging from the shattered trunk.

INSTINCTIVELY Barry raised his pistol—and then remembered it was empty. The enormous snake lunged suddenly at him. It paid no heed to the fleeing trucker and porter. And it flashed upon Barry why. Vroom had anointed his uniform with the contents of the vial when Barry had been held prisoner. The giant serpent, its appetite still unsatisfied, was making for him as it might have made for the lamb used for bait. He knew it would seek him as its prey above all others. He could feel the hair rising upon his head.

He leaped backward as the serpent writhed free of the splintered trunk. He turned, and sprang through the doorway, back into the lobby of the apartment hotel.

But the gigantic serpent was almost at his heels. Barry screamed out, "Look out!" and sped across the lobby as fast as terror could drive him.

Pandemonium broke loose in the crowded lobby as the monstrous silver serpent slithered across the tiled floor. Women screamed. Men shouted. Everyone broke from the path of the fleeing policeman, with the giant snake so close behind.

The reptile was moving at incredible speed, far faster than a man could run. It was within a yard of Barry as he dived through the revolving doors.

He heaved a great, gasping sigh of relief as he gained the sidewalk outside. His first thought was of Adell—Adell, inside, with the giant serpent.

He leaped to one side, where he could peer through a plate glass window. A glance showed him the switchboard was deserted.

"At least, she's safe!" he gasped.

The lobby had been cleared of people as if by magic. The huge serpent was back in the center of the lobby, its weaving head lifted high above its coiled body as it cast about for its vanished prey.

And then it saw Barry, through the window, and started for him. Barry turned and fled.

Doubtless the giant snake never knew the plate glass was between it and its prey. It struck the window at express-train speed. Its armored head burst through the glass like a battering-ram. Glass clattered to the sidewalk, and shattered to bits.

Barry was frantic with fear as he turned and sped toward the corner. He knew only too well what capture by the dreadful reptile meant. He could picture the serpent overtaking him, twining its crushing coils about him, devouring him in full view of thousands of helpless persons. His heart was pounding as if it were about to burst.

"I—I can't outrun it!" was the thought that flashed through his mind. "My only chance is to hop one of these autos!"

Around the corner ahead, a huge maroon-and-silver Rolls roadster was swinging, heading toward the pier. Barry saw it in a passing glance. It registered the thought that Vroom was escaping. But Barry wasted no thought upon him, then.

As the serpent burst into the street, a horrified scream went up. The after-theater traffic was fairly heavy. A wave of frightened pedestrians swept back in both directions on the sidewalk. Passing

motor traffic speeded up to the utmost.

Barry's best bet was to grab a passing car at the corner, in the cross traffic. Again the giant serpent was almost on his heels as he reached the corner.

A truck swung past—the same truck that had been loading at the service entrance when the appearance of the silver snake had sent the terrified driver into his cab and speeding away. Barry swung himself into the back of the truck. Panting, he shouted at the driver:

"Step on it, damn you! Drive like hell!"

The driver cast one terrified glance behind him. Then he stepped on it. He drove like hell.

THE truck swung around another car. The traffic light was against them. But by now traffic lights meant nothing to any of the motorists. Traffic was utterly demoralized. The sight of the gigantic serpent had thrown every person within eye-range into utter panic.

Cars were shooting through the red light. Two of them piled up in the center of the intersection. Their occupants leaped out and fled afoot, screaming.

Barry saw the truck was holding its own with the pursuing serpent. He knew that if they could once get in the open, where there was no impeding traffic, they could outrun it. But dead ahead a black sedan cut across their path.

The truck sideswiped the sedan, sheared off a fender, shoved it into the curb. The rear end skewed about sharply, and Barry was almost thrown to the pavement.

"Faster!" he shouted at the driver.

An earthquake could have caused little more commotion than the startling appearance of the monstrous silver serpent in the crowded city street. Panic gripped everyone who saw it.

The driver needed none of Barry's

urging. Already he was driving like a madman.

Turning the corner ahead, Barry again saw the big maroon-and-silver roadster. But this time something arrested his eye. Beside Vroom, who was driving, sat—Adell Denby!

Barry gasped. His sweetheart—with Vroom, the murderer!

The explanation flashed upon him suddenly. He cursed himself for his stupidity. For he, himself, had led Adell into what doubtless was a death trap! Hadn't he boasted to Vroom that he had the goods on him? That the 'phone operator's testimony was enough to send him to the chair?

He groaned. "He checked up, and found it was the truth—and I was dumb enough to let him go! He knew he must get rid of her—that her testimony meant his death! It was time for her to leave at midnight. He offered to take her home in his car. But instead of taking her home——"

5. *The Doom Ship*

HE'S going to seal her lips by—by killing her!" he gasped frantically.

Suddenly he turned his empty pistol on the truck-driver.

"Follow that roadster!" he rasped furiously.

The driver glanced over his shoulder. The serpent was falling behind. They were getting out of the congested traffic district now, heading down a dark side street, lined with warehouses; heading toward the river.

"Go to hell!" gasped the terrorized driver. Even the threat of the pistol muzzle could not swerve him from his course. Between the gun and the serpent, he'd take his chance with the former. "If you want to chase that car, hop out and chase it, Big Boy! Me, I'm going places—fast!"

He was. Now that he had a fairly open street, he floor-boarded the throttle pedal. The truck leaped forward. It was gaining on the speeding serpent at every turn of the wheels.

Barry was in a quandary. Vroom, the murderer, was taking away the girl he loved—taking her away to get rid of her, doubtless.

"But what can I do?" he groaned, helplessly. "If I jump out, it means the end of me if the—the devil-snake catches up with me! And that won't be helping her! Besides, I could never catch up with the roadster, afoot."

Ahead, a uniformed officer leaped out into the glow of a street light, signalling the speeding truck to stop. Barry recognized the patrolman, and tried to shout at him. But his voice was lost in the uproar as the truck shot past.

Barry heard a fusillade of pistol shots. The patrolman, doubtless startled almost out of his senses by the speeding, phosphorescent serpent gliding down the dark street at express-train speed, had opened fire. But to hit such a slender, moving mark requires an expert marksman, one whose aim is not shaken by fright.

As he watched, the speeding truck swerved. Barry, almost losing his balance, glanced ahead. To his horror he saw that the street ended at the river—that the truck was speeding far too fast to make the turn in safety.

The driver, driven mad by fear, realized the situation too late. He applied the brakes as he tried to turn. There could be but one result.

The truck crashed sidewise through the fence alongside the quay. The next instant it was spinning through space. Barry jumped.

He struck the water on his back, well away from the truck. The impact almost knocked the breath from his lungs. As he was pinwheeling through the air, he re-

membered that Vroom had indicated that the anaconda, in its wild state, was a semi-aquatic reptile—for hadn't Cariaco always baited his traps near the water's edge?

"If the damned thing can swim like it can travel on land, then it's all up with me!" was the thought that flashed through his mind.

As he struck the water he rolled over and dived. He swam under water until his lungs were almost ready to burst. He came to the surface for a gasp of air, dived again, and swam under water again.

Five times he did this, without once wasting time enough to glance behind to see if the serpent was following him. Then when he came to the surface, almost exhausted, he found himself in the path of a motorboat.

He cried out. A spotlight rested upon him. Then hands were dragging him, his strength almost gone, over the side.

"Why, it's—it's a cop!" someone cried, as a flashlight played upon his dripping uniform. "A cop, swimming 'way out here in the middle of the river!"

Barry glanced about fearfully. He could see nothing of the dreaded phosphorescent head breaking the surface. He heaved a huge sigh of relief.

"What's happened?" excited voices were asking him.

He dared not tell the truth, for fear they would think him a madman.

"Watch the papers in the morning, and you'll read all about it! Take me to that pier over there—over where that white yacht is moored!"

He remembered the number of the pier Vroom had named, and knew that the yacht he saw there must be the zoologist's.

"That's where he's taken Adell, if anywhere!" he thought.

Moments later, dripping wet, he was

unloaded on the pier near by and bade farewell to the boatmen. He stared at the yacht. Apparently it was deserted, even by its crew.

As he stood there, panting, he heard a scream. A woman's scream. A scream of frightful horror. It came from the yacht. He thought he recognized the voice of—Adell!

"Man, oh man!" he burst forth in a great, sobbing cry. "If that fiend is——"

He wasted no more time in words. He swarmed up the hawser and clambered over the rail. Instinctively he drew his empty pistol. The cabin was lighted. He sped across the deck toward it.

Again that shriek came from the cabin. It mounted up and up, higher and higher. It seemed to turn Barry's blood to water.

"Adell!" he called out at the top of his voice. At once he knew he had done a foolish thing. He had but warned the zoologist, and had in no way helped the girl.

HE FLUNG himself at the cabin door. It burst from its hinges beneath his weight, and he staggered into the cabin. The light almost blinded him. He blinked, and rubbed his eyes.

Before he could see clearly, his nostrils caught a familiar odor—musty, faintly sickening—the same odor he had detected when he had burst into the penthouse—the same that had arisen when Vroom had poured the contents of the vial on his uniform.

Then he knew. The ghastly silver serpent was here on the yacht! The water must have washed the substance from his own clothing when he plunged in the river, so that the giant snake no longer was driven to pursue him. Vroom must have seen the end of the chase through the streets, and had strewn the contents of the vial about the yacht so that it would

attract the reptile, and he could recapture it.

But Barry did not know the whole horrible truth until he had blinked his eyes again. What he saw froze the blood in his veins.

Adell—in the coils of the serpent! Adell, staggering backward, her supple body wound round and about by the leprous silver snake. Her head thrown back, eyes seeming about to start from their sockets. Both arms free, pounding harmlessly at the horrible, scaly head with its unblinking eyes, weaving before her.

For an instant Barry's heart seemed to stop beating. He seemed momentarily hypnotized, unable to act.

He saw Vroom, in his high heels and evening clothes, gloating as he held the vial in one hand while the other was thrust in the pocket of his dinner jacket, gripping a pistol. Barry heard his demoniacal chuckle:

"She'll never live to testify against me! . . . So-o-o!"

Barry wanted to smash that gloating, sneering face to a bleeding pulp. He wanted to kill that fiendish zoologist with his two hands. But that must wait. Before that, he must save Adell—if he could!

He knew now that Vroom had used Adell as the bait to attract the gigantic serpent back to the yacht; that, unknown to her, he must have sprinkled some of the contents of the vial on her clothing.

Barry launched himself forward. With his empty pistol he struck at the weaving, scaly head. The blow slid off, deflected as if by armor plate.

He stamped on the writhing tail of the reptile. It lashed away, partly unwinding from about the girl's thighs.

"Barry!" she called faintly, imploringly. Then both the struggling girl and the serpent plunged to the floor.

Barry leaped upon the writhing thing,

stamping on its lashing tail, battering with his empty automatic at the upper part of its body. White-hot rage drove him on. Adell, her ashen face averted, had braced both hands against the scaly monster. She was exerting every last ounce of her waning strength in holding it away. No longer did she waste breath screaming.

Twenty minutes ago Barry had been fleeing in stark terror. But now that the girl he loved was in the toils of the monster, he had lost all fear. He was conscious only of a terrible lust to kill—to kill this slimy thing, to kill its fiendish master!

His punishment was hurting the great reptile. Its huge head was darting back and forth, striving to dodge his blows. Its tail, now unwinding from the girl's body, thrashed and squirmed and writhed under his feet. Then, suddenly, it reached forth like the tentacle of an octopus and coiled about Barry's ankles.

Its grip was like steel. Barry struggled to kick himself free. He clutched at a stanchion to keep his feet from being jerked from under him. For a fleeting instant he saw the pot-bellied little zoologist, dancing about in glee in his high-heeled oxfords.

With a gasp of horror Barry realized another fold of the serpent's tail had coiled about him, knee-high. It flashed upon him that every coil wound about him meant a coil unwound from Adell's body.

His life for hers? If that was the way it was fated—well, fair enough! He heard Adell gasp, and saw her roll free. He wondered if the next moment would see him crushed to death in those constricting coils, as Trehearne had been crushed.

He wanted to scream out in terror. But he told himself that, if his time had come, he'd die in silence, like a man, even though none but Vroom should know it.

The little zoologist was dancing about, the vial held high above his head, like some primitive medicine man at a human sacrifice. As Barry felt the coils tighten about his legs, he mustered all his remaining strength to fling his empty pistol at that gloating face.

But even as the weapon was about to leave his hand he changed his mind. It flashed upon him how he might, with one swift stroke, save Adell and himself and bring disaster to Vroom!

So he flung the weapon, but not at Vroom's face. The weapon smashed the pottery vial in the gloating scientist's upraised hand. Vroom was drenched with the potent liquid that held such a powerful attraction for the serpent.

FOR the merest instant the weaving head of the monster became motionless. Then the ghastly creature whipped about and lunged at its master. Barry saw the zoologist's face go white as he leaped backward, tugging at the pistol in his pocket.

Another instant, and the gun was drawn. Simultaneously the first fold of the silver serpent twisted about Vroom's body, pinning both arms to his sides. Barry heard a scream of utter terror. He heard the pistol clatter to the floor. He heard the snapping of bones.

Then, as the reptile's tail unwound from about Barry's legs his numbed muscles failed to support him. As he fell his head struck the stanchion. For a moment everything went blank.

Adell's voice calling his name faintly brought him to his senses. He blinked and sat up. He saw the girl, who had fainted from fright in the grip of the serpent, start toward him as she recovered consciousness.

He saw, too, a huge, misshapen serpentine shape squirming through the companionway, the form of the gigantic

silver serpent; but slow and sluggish now, because of the huge bulge in its middle.

Barry spun about and dived for the automatic that had clattered, unfired, from Vroom's fingers. He snatched it up and leaped for the deck. Adell joined him in the companionway door, and his left arm circled her shoulders. The logy reptile was slowly crawling across the deck.

The automatic roared. The serpent jerked convulsively as the steel-jacketed bullet bored into its slimy folds.

Again and again Barry fired. Adell shuddered and buried her face on his shoulder as the monster writhed and

jerked and twisted itself into knots in its death throes. As he emptied the last shell into its squirming body it slid under the rail and dropped into the water.

"Barry!" Adell was clinging to him, quivering with fright. "It's been so horrible—so terrible! You saved me from the most awful——"

"Forget it!" advised Barry as he drew her closer to him. Over her shoulder, he could see the interior of the cabin, and all that was left of the pot-bellied zoologist—a high-heeled shoe, fallen from his foot as he had vanished down the serpent's maw.