

UNCANNY, SPOOKY, CREEPY TALES

# Ghost

## STORIES

APRIL

A MACFADDEN  
PUBLICATION  
PRICE  
UNITED STATES  
25¢  
CANADA  
30¢

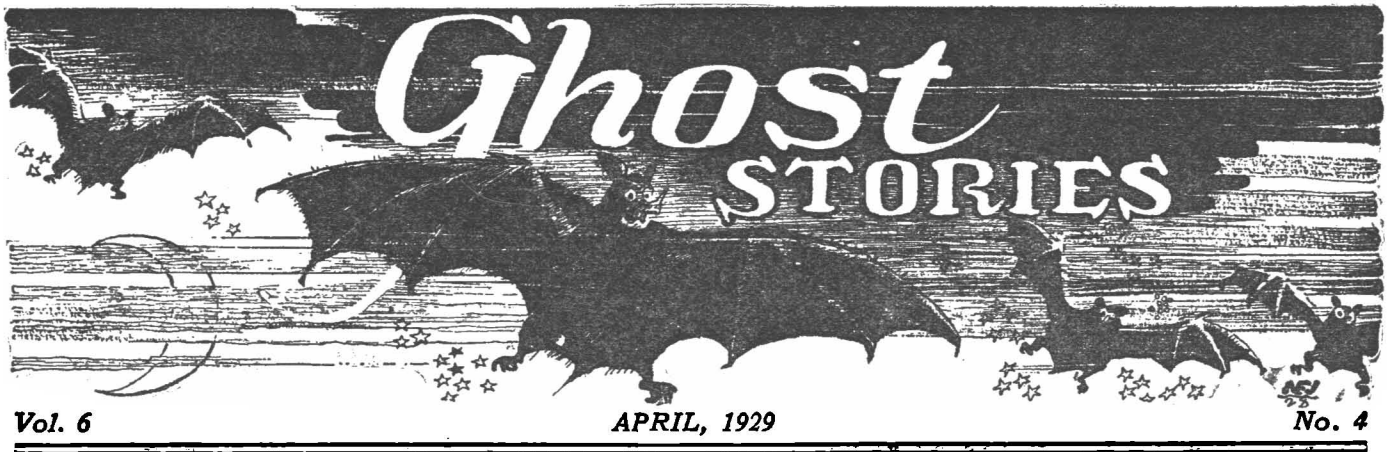


**COINS  
of DOOM**

**SHE WALKS  
in BEAUTY**

**THE STRANGEST  
MURDER TRIAL**

**DID the GHOST of  
BISMARCK WARN  
the KAISER ?**



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Published Monthly by THE CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLISHING CORPORATION, Washington and South Aves., Dunellen, N. J.  
 Editorial and General Offices, MacLadden Building, 1926 Broadway, N. Y.  
 Charles Mendel, President William Thompson, Secretary  
 M. L. Wilson, Jr., Advertising Manager, Graybar Building, 420 Lexington Ave., New York, N. Y.  
 Entered as second class matter April 30th, 1926, at the Post Office at Dunellen, N. J., under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Additional entry at New York, N. Y.  
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 Price 25c a copy in U. S.—30c in Canada. Subscription price \$2.50 a year in the United States and its possessions; also Cuba, Mexico and Panama. All other countries including Canada \$4.00 per year.  
 Chicago Office: 168 North Michigan Blvd., C. H. Shattuck, Manager.  
 London Agents: Atlas Publishing & Distributing Co., Ltd., 18 Bride Lane, London, E. C.  
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 PRINTED BY THE ART COLOR PRINTING CO., DUNELLEN, N. J., U. S. A.

# COINS of Doom

By HARRY MASON

*As told to Urann Thayer*



**W**HENEVER I see Lillian Holt's sad, beautiful face, as she walks listlessly through the streets of our village on the Hudson, I am almost overcome with shame and sorrow. For, although she does not know it, I am to blame for her tragedy. I would gladly give up everything I possess if I could only forget that terrible summer night when three human beings were trapped in a weird disaster.

It all began when Tom Blake, Lillian's fiancé, stood with me in the lamp-lit, dust-covered living room of the deserted house where "Skinflint" Roger had died a year before. We were gazing down at a dead body at our feet. Three or four young men stood around, waiting restlessly.

Tom and I were "special police." During the college vacation we had been earning a little money by acting as assistants to "Chief" Fuller, Winton's only regular officer. As he had gone to Albany on business, it had devolved upon us to investigate the report that a dead tramp had been found in the old Roger house, a mile out of town. The other men had come with us out of idle curiosity.

As we stared at the corpse, the silence was broken at last by Buck Chambers.

"How do you reckon he come to kick in?" he asked, in a voice unconsciously low. "There ain't no marks on him what I can see!"

One by one the others offered their opinions in half whispers. But through it all Tom remained silent, staring at the body with a thoughtful look on his handsome, boyish face. Finally, at his suggestion, one of the men started for town in search of Doctor Jackson, who acted as a sort of deputy coroner; the others becoming more and more uneasy in the silence of the gloomy house, muttered their ex-

cuses and slipped away, leaving Tom and me alone with the dead man.

Both of us stood there motionless until the voices, more cheerful as they left the house behind them, died away in the distance. Then, with a puzzled frown, Tom knelt beside the body to examine it more carefully.

The dead man was an evil-looking brute. He was huge, almost large enough to be called a giant, and he lay there with his flabby lips parted in a ghastly grin, his tiny pig-eyes staring up at the ceiling with a look of horror that almost made me shudder. Perhaps it was the gloom of that faded room, or the whisper of the summer breeze through the black pines outside the open window, but whatever it was, I was weighed down by a feeling of depression that my own youthful inexperience with dead people could not entirely account for.

Suddenly Tom looked up at me.

"**H**ARRY," he said in a low voice, "do you remember what people said when old Skinflint died? He swore to kill anybody, even after his death, who found the hiding-place of his money."

As he spoke, he loosened the clenched fingers of the dead man's hand—and two gold coins, large and glittering in the lamplight, rolled out across the floor! The sound seemed to echo noisily through the empty house.

I stared at the coins in complete astonishment and then turned to gaze at my chum, who was looking at me with a strange expression on his face.

"Tom Blake!" I cried. "Do you mean to say you're fool enough to believe——"

But I got no further. Suddenly Tom grasped my arm.



Can  
a Dead Man's  
Curse  
Destroy the  
Living?  
I KNOW the  
Answer!  
For I Found  
a Miser's  
Haunted Gold—  
and I, My Pal  
and His Sweetheart  
Were Caught  
in the Grip  
of Hell!

"Harry!" he whispered. "Don't you feel it? Something in this house!" He stared ahead of him with widened eyes. "Something listening . . . listening . . ."

I did not answer, a cold shiver crept up my spine, and I had a queer presentiment that some uncanny disaster lay just ahead of us.

In a moment, however, I shook off my uneasiness and said:

"You're crazy, Tom—crazy or afraid of your own shadow!"

To this day I have never ceased to regret the careless, taunting words I spoke to him that night. For Tom was the finest fellow I ever knew—and the bravest! But at that moment I smiled contemptuously at what I considered his weakness.

I turned toward the door and added curtly:

"I'm going back to town. I was due on my beat half an hour ago. You stay here till Doc Jackson comes."

I pulled open the door and was about to step out onto the wooded path, when once more Tom took hold of my arm.

"Listen, Harry," he murmured. "I—I'll stay. Only just wait here while I take a look through the house, will you?" He dropped his eyes, slightly ashamed. "It—it will give me a little confidence to glance around a bit," he said.

For a minute I stared at him, incredulous. Tom Blake, actually afraid! I started to speak, and then sat down, shrugging my shoulders.

"Go ahead, only make it snappy," I told him. "And whistle! That will give you courage if you need it." But Tom did not apparently hear my last remark. He had crossed to the door leading to the dark stairway and was pulling it open.

I heard him mount the stairs. The door swung shut after him, deadening the sound of his soft footsteps. After a moment, everything was absolutely still again.

For fifteen minutes I sat in the silence of that room, waiting for my friend to return from what I considered a fool's errand, and for some unknown reason I tried to keep my eyes away from the corpse of the filthy, gigantic tramp. Once I thought I heard a startled cry above me; but it was not repeated, and I decided it must have been my imagination.

My eyes fell on the two gold coins shining in the lamp-light. With a feeling of curiosity, I crossed the room and picked them up to examine them.

They were both ten dollar pieces, one of 1893, the other of 1886. I gazed at them for a moment and then looked down at the dead tramp. Had this man really discovered the hiding-place of the old miser's wealth, or—

I did not finish the thought. Suddenly I swung around to face the closed stairway door.

WAS it my imagination, or was there *something* beyond that door watching me? Was it the reflection of the lamp-light, or did I see an inhumanly bright eye, looking through the wide cracks, burning with angry malevolence?

"Tom!" I called softly.

He did not answer, and I strode across the room and opened the door cautiously.

The hall and stairway were empty. I cursed angrily under my breath.

"That boy is making me as nervous as he is!" I muttered. Then, looking up into the darkness, I called again:

"Tom!"

There was no answer. I waited a moment and the echoes died away, leaving only the dismal humming of the insects outside.

"Tom!" I shouted in sudden panic and this time my cry echoed eerily through the dark woods beyond the house.

Still he did not reply. Throwing the door wide open, I ran up the rickety stairs to the second floor. Here I felt my way along a narrow hallway until I reached an open doorway where I stopped a moment.

Across the room I could vaguely make out a small window, and beyond it the pale moonlit sky above the thick black pines. I listened a minute, but there was no sound, save that of my rapid breathing. Noiselessly, I tiptoed to the next room and to the next—but there was no sign of Tom.

**F**INALLY I reached a partly shut door. Grasping it gently, I pulled it wide open and was about to take a step forward, when suddenly I jumped back.

There was a whirring sound as something shot through the darkness toward me. A cold, tight hand grabbed at my throat.

"Now I've got you, whoever you are!" muttered a low, tense voice.

"Tom!" I cried. I struck at his arm and broke away with difficulty. "Tom! Have you lost your mind?"

I heard him gasp as he realized his mistake, and I could feel the trembling of the hand that reached for my arm. For a minute or so he did not speak. Then at last he whispered: "But it wasn't you the other time! It *couldn't* have been!"

"What other time?" I demanded.

He remained silent for a moment, and his hand gripped my arm tightly in the darkness.

"I hunted through all the rooms down here," he finally whispered, "and then I opened this door and found these steps, leading to the attic. I started up them; and when I got to the top, it seemed as if something cold and terrible touched me. I heard you call, but I couldn't answer. There was a strange, icy clutching at my heart! When you called, though, the feeling stopped, and it seemed as though something flitted by me, down the stairs. I came down, and then I heard you tiptoeing up, and I thought it was that thing again."

For a second I thought of the eyes I had felt staring at me downstairs—eyes that had apparently been drawn there by my touching the miser's coins. But immediately I laughed at myself and pulled my arm roughly away from Tom. He was a coward, I decided, and his cowardice had affected even my dull imagination! What was the matter with my chum?

"Listen, Tom!" I snapped. "There's nothing in this old house except us and that dead body downstairs—and you know damned well there isn't! The murder has just got on your nerves! Here!" I added, taking a flashlight from my pocket and handing it to him. "You hold this and watch me go up to the attic! I'll just strike a match and look around to prove you're dreaming!" And without waiting for his reply, I turned and climbed the stairs, watching my own black shadow creep ahead of me in the light of the torch Tom held below.

I reached the top, struck a match and looked around. I was in a long, dark room that ran the length of the house. Low-hung rafters stretched above me, disappearing into the darkness beyond the light of my flickering match. Everything was still . . . so still that far away I could hear the lonely call of a hoot owl.

Holding the match high, I peered into the darkness, as far as I could see—for, somehow, I again had that queer sensation that eyes were gazing at me from the shadows. However, I once more shook off this feeling and walked back to the head of the stairs.

Tom still stood below, holding the light.

"I've looked all around, Tom," I called down, my voice booming strangely through the deserted house, "but I cannot find anything—no cutthroats, wild animals, ghosts, or——" Suddenly I stopped short.

Above the glare of the light he held, I could just make out Tom's eyes. And as they stared up at me, I could see them widen with fear; a queer feeling crept up my spine.

"What's the matter, Tom," I snapped. "Why are you staring at me like that?"

For a second he did not reply. He gazed up at me with a look of unspeakable horror . . . but was it at *me* he gazed? I saw him wet his lips to speak, while I watched him with astonishment. At last he spoke.

"Harry!" he cried, and his voice was hoarse with horror, "look out, Harry! *Look out behind you!*" And at the same moment his light snapped off, leaving us in total darkness.

I whirled around, striking out blindly. Did I touch something, for one brief second—something icy and clammy—as my hand reached out in the dark?

At any rate, I recoiled suddenly, tripped on the top step and hurtled headlong down the stairs. Tom helped me to my feet, while I cursed and groaned and laughed. I hardly listened while he told of seeing something vaguely white behind me. More in anger than in pain—anger at what I considered Tom's cowardice—I limped down the lower flight of stairs to the living room.

"You go along home," I snapped, as we stood beside the dead tramp. "Maybe when you get out of here, I'll get back some of my manhood!"

Tom stared at me, unbelieving. I think it was the first time in his life anybody had accused him of being a coward; and I'm sure nobody but myself could have done it and got away with it.

"No, Harry," he replied quietly. "You should have been on duty long ago, and you're a mile away from town. I'll stay here till the doctor comes."

**"A**ND face the chances of a ghost coming down from the attic after you again?" I sneered.

A dangerous light gleamed in his eyes.

"Perhaps I'll go up there and face him," he replied, in a low voice. "Perhaps I'm not quite such a coward as you think I am . . . Good night, Harry," he added, holding open the door.

For a second I hesitated; then I thought, "It will do him good to face his imaginary fears, rather than run away from them. And, as he said, I am long overdue on my Main Street post. I'd better go ahead.

I started down the path.

"Good night, Tom," I murmured and, added with a laugh: "If the ghost gets you, send me a little message—by telepathy—and I'll come back to rescue you."

And with those words I left him there—left my best friend alone in that house of terror! A thousand times I have tried to tell myself that I am not to be blamed for what followed—but I know only too well that I am.

When I reached the dusty road, Tom was still standing in the doorway of the dismal house, and I could see, in the light

of the pale moon, a curiously twisted smile on his colorless face as he looked after me.

For over two hours I paced my beat, up and down the deserted main street of the village. Nothing disturbed the peaceful quiet of the night, save the sound of my own feet, echoing hollowly, and the half-hour ringing of the bells in the steeple of the Congregational Church.

I heard the clock strike ten . . . ten-thirty . . . as I walked up and down, up and down. Then, as eleven strokes vibrated in the air and died away, I reached the end of my beat, and was about to turn, when suddenly I stopped. The figure of a girl appeared from a side street, and came hurrying silent-



ly toward me. It was pretty Lillian Holt, Tom's fiancée.

"Lillian!" I cried, as she halted in front of me. "What are you doing out alone at this hour?" Eleven o'clock is late and long past Winton's bedtime.

She stood clutching her black cape around her throat, breathing heavily.

"Harry," she finally said in a low voice, "where is Tom?"

"Why, he——" I hesitated. I had almost forgotten about Tom and what I considered his absurd fears; but instantly I decided it would be wiser not to tell Lillian that he was sitting up with a corpse. "Why, he went down the road, on a little errand for Doctor Jackson," I replied at last.

"Doctor Jackson?" Lillian stared at me. "How could that be? The Doctor has been across the river all day on an operating case, and he won't be back till morning!"

A feeling of uneasiness seized me; so the doctor could not relieve Tom before morning!

"Are—are you sure Tom's all right?" Lillian whispered.

"Right as a tick," I answered. "Why?"

"I—I was in bed, asleep," she said, so low I could scarcely hear her, "and it seemed as if he stood beside me and—

asked me to deliver a message to somebody. It must have been just a nightmare, but it upset me so much that I dressed and came out to ask you what to do. I don't know what put you in my mind," she added, with a nervous laugh. "I must still be half asleep."

I laughed with her.

"And for whom was this important message intended?" I asked her jokingly.

She was smiling now, completely reassured.

"I don't know," she confessed.

"But I remember the words, very

plainly. 'Tell him,' he said, 'tell him that this is the message he asked me to send—that I wasn't such a coward after all!' And—and, Harry," she went on, the worried expression reappearing on her pretty face, "he was smiling that twisted, wistful little smile of his—I could see it so clearly!"

I turned my head away. A cold shudder, icy as the wind of death, passed over my body. With an effort I controlled myself, telling her laughingly that it was only a nightmare. I reassured her and sent her home, happy.

**B**UT I was far from happy as I paced my beat, back and forth, back and forth, listening to the lonely sound of my own footsteps. I told myself that this fear was absurd. How could a normal human being in the Twentieth Century actually believe in ghosts? Impossible! I was a worse coward than Tom could ever hope to be!

The clock struck the half hour . . . midnight . . . twelve-thirty. I paced back and forth, arguing with myself.

Suddenly I thought I heard someone call my name.

"Harry!"

I stopped in my tracks and looked around. Up and down, as far as I could see, the street was deserted. I turned back to continue my beat, when once more the voice sounded, low

but distinct, close to me. I was too surprised to move.

"Harry!"

This time there was no mistaking whose voice called. I would know that voice anywhere in the world; I will know it if I hear it on my deathbed. It was Tom Blake's voice!

I stood, rooted to the spot, staring into space. A cold chill crept up and down my spine; but I listened intently.

"What is it, Tom?" I finally managed to whisper.

There was no answer. I waited a long time on that dark and dismal street, wondering what to do. Then, suddenly I made my decision. I turned in the direction of the pine woods.

**B**UT I had scarcely made my decision—I had not taken one step forward—when that voice came a third time.

"Harry," it called, like a breath in my ear, "don't go!"

"Don't go?" I thought; and although I was silent, it seemed as though I shouted the words. "Don't go? Do you think I'm the coward I was skunk enough to call you?"

The answer came, fainter now, and farther away.

"You didn't . . . mean it . . . Harry," it whispered, growing fainter and fainter, "but don't . . . go . . . for . . . God's . . ."

And then it died away, on the stillness of the night air.

I started down the street, forgetting my beat, forgetting everything but the fact that I had left Tom alone in that dismal cottage—left him with a sneer at his "cowardice." Was it already *too late*? I hurried frantically on. Had that voice been telepathy, or just my imagination? I stumbled blindly on through the darkness.

The houses on Main Street were left behind and I was in the black, ghostly pine woods, the

dusty, winding road shining palely ahead of me in the moonlight. The thick dust of the road deadened the sound of my hurrying feet, the only sound in all that quiet night was the eerie moan of the breeze through the treetops.

It seemed an endless distance, my progress was so slow, winding in and out of the dense woods. Far away, I heard the bells of the clock in the church tower. One . . . two . . . And the faint echo sounded in the stillness around me like the farewell to life of a man treading the path toward Eternity. Then, after a sudden turn in the road, the old house loomed before me.

It looked more dismal, more broken-down, than ever before. Its unpainted sides stood out in the faint, white light of the moon, while the black windows with the panes half broken seemed to leer at me menacingly.

One window, in particular—the small square one up in the attic—was there something behind it in the still, dark room? Something waiting there for me?

Putting aside my fear, I stepped up to the door and walked in.

The oil of the living-room lamp had nearly burned out, but a blue flame still flickered there, filling the room with a ghastly light. Perhaps it was due to the light, or perhaps

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## How Lord Erskine Paid a Debt to a Ghost

Lord Erskine, famous orator and statesman, is the authority for one of the strangest true ghost stories ever told—the pathetic story of a dying butler who was cheated by a dishonest steward. You will find his amazing narrative among the SPIRIT TALES in this issue of GHOST STORIES.

Each month SPIRIT TALES presents brief, fascinating accounts of the greatest occult mysteries of the past and present. Don't miss any of them!

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it was because of my own feelings or the loneliness of the place, but that house seemed permeated with a sense of watchful death. The air in that dimly lit room somehow seemed poisonous for a human being to breathe.

I started toward the stairway door, glancing at the body of the tramp lying on the floor beside the table.

Suddenly I stopped dead short!

Those eyes . . . those dead eyes . . . was there a glint of life in them, an evil, watchful gleam?

I stepped over to the body and looked down. But I saw only the glassy stare of death.

Clenching my fists, I strode to the door, threw it open and looked up into the darkness.

"Tom!" I called.

My voice called back to me loudly, the silence of the night accentuating it. Then it died away, and everything was still again.

EVERYTHING was still . . . and yet, somehow, in that eerily lit room, in those dark rooms above me, there seemed to be a brooding Presence, listening to my voice, waiting for me. . . .

I pulled my flashlight from my pocket and started up the stairs. The wood beneath my feet was old and rotten, and in spite of my light tread, my steps resounded in the dark, empty rooms overhead. I reached the small hall and flashed my light around.

Four open doors stood out with startling vividness. The rooms were empty, as I more or less expected them to be; I could plainly see the broken-down chairs and stripped beds, and, beyond the dirty windows, the somber, straight-standing pines. I tiptoed across the hall, opened the little door and started up the narrow stairway leading to the attic.

And as I mounted with slow and cautious step, I felt that hovering spirit more strongly than ever. The air seemed charged with something indescribably obnoxious and dangerous, like a heavy, deadly gas. Tensing myself, to fight down my fear, I mounted to the top and, without lighting my flash, I stood for a moment in the darkness holding my breath.

There was no sound; not a thing stirred. At the far end of the room I could make out the tiny window. The pale moonlit sky shone through it clearly, casting a faint square of light on the floor. Suddenly I snapped on my light and flashed it around.

I turned the beam from side to side, but the big room seemed empty. And yet, somehow, just beyond the bright circle of my light, I felt the presence of *Something*; something that stood very still, watching me. At times it almost seemed as though I could make out its burning eyes gazing directly at me.

I tiptoed across the floor till I reached the wall, and then I started to make a slow circuit of the big room, intending to inspect every niche and corner. I walked down one side, my light flashing along; made my way the length of the second side; and was just starting up the third, when suddenly I drew back with a startled exclamation.

At my feet was a long, dark hole where a wide board had been removed. Neatly arranged along the edge, as though they had just been lifted from the hole, were a row of canvas bags apparently bulging with money—and near the wall I glimpsed a small chest overflowing with gold coins! Beside the chest was an old-fashioned candle-stick with burnt-out candle.

But it was not this discovery that brought a cry of horror to my lips; it was what I saw just beyond.

On the dusty floor lay the body of my chum, his white face contorted by the agony of death, his sightless eyes still staring as though at some horrible apparition!

Summoning all my courage, I knelt by the body, feeling the heart, lifting the arm with the vain hope of finding some faint beat in the pulse. And as I lifted it, the clenched fist fell open and a glittering gold coin dropped noisily to the

floor. The shadows seemed to close around me menacingly.

For a moment I stared at the coin in horror. So Tom had found the miser's hidden wealth, as the tramp had done before him . . . and, like the filthy brute downstairs, my dear friend had paid a horrible penalty! Scarcely realizing what I did, I stooped down and took the coin in my hand.

There was a whirring sound. A breath of icy air stirred against my face. And then, suddenly, I felt long, cold fingers reach out and touch me.

With that touch came a freezing, deadening sensation, lessening my heart beats, numbing my entire body.

I whirled around, but I saw nothing. I tried to rise to my feet, but my legs were fast weakening and I could not move.

And still those icy fingers touched me, drawing at my heart's blood. I could feel the beats slow down: *one, two . . . three . . . four . . .* then, after an interminable wait, a deathly sickness—*five*. I collapsed on the floor. All life seemed to leave me except in the hand that still clutched the gold coin.

And now, as I lay there, I could make out a vague, shimmering whiteness stooping over my body. Two eyes, burning malignantly, stared into mine, becoming brighter and brighter as consciousness of the world around me became fainter. An unearthly hand was placed close to my slowly beating heart—more than close to it; it seemed to pass *through my body* and touch the heart itself!

I think I was dead. I could not move, feel or think. A strange lightness was passing over me. And then, suddenly, the hand that touched my motionless heart was pulled away. The form above my helpless body sat upright and listened.

Far below us, there was a slight sound, a sound different from any I had ever heard, because it was not the sound of a living being. Something moved . . . crept stealthily up the stairs to the hall on the second floor . . . stood listening for a moment . . . and then came up the steps to the attic.

Crouching stiffly beside me, my ghostly conqueror waited and listened. The soft, crunching footsteps came up, up. For a moment they paused outside the attic door, which had swung to; then, slowly, a form appeared, passing *through* the door—the huge form of the dead tramp, ghostly white now, like my captor.

He stood upright, his head brushing the low-hung rafters. Not bothering to look at us, his eyes turned to the hole in the floor near-by, the hole where the miser's wealth was hidden. Then, quickly and noiselessly, he glided across to it. Even in death, when the first wave of supernatural power had passed over him, the brute's first move was toward the gold—useless as dirt to him now!

He reached the hole and, dropping to his knees before it, his huge, bodiless hands reached for the coins. But before he could touch them, he sat upright and spun around.

WITH that queer, whirring noise, the other creature—the ghost of the miser—hurled itself toward the tramp with the speed of lightning. The tramp jumped up to face him. And then commenced the strangest, the most hideous battle a man ever witnessed—the battle of two lost spirits, fighting for gold that they could never use!

How shall I describe it? There are no words in the human vocabulary to adequately portray that unhuman strife. Lying there motionless, unable to move, my eyes could hardly follow the swiftness of their action; my ears, only partially attuned to the noises of the dead, caught terrible sounds, screeches of pain and anger that rent the air . . . and yet were soundless. How could it be? How could the dead inflict injuries on the dead?

I was never to know the answer and I thank God for that! For suddenly I heard a noise, so faint to my nearly deadened senses that it seemed more like the memory of a sound. It was the sound of human voices!

The two struggling forms stood still. Like wild animals scenting danger, they remained tense and motionless, listen-

ing. Below us, footsteps crossed the living room and opened the door.

"Hello, up there!" somebody shouted.

I lay without moving. I could not open my lips; there was no life in me to do even that. A minute's wait followed; then somebody else spoke.

"There ain't nobody up there, Doc Jackson!" I heard Buck Chambers say. "Tom and Harry, they got scared of this tramp here, I reckon, and they beat it!" I heard his hearty laugh, along with the others—the laughter of a man who had slunk away earlier in the evening, leaving Tom and me alone in that house of horror.

"Let's take the body along now," said another voice. "I got to get on home."

Praying with all that was left of me, I waited in despairing helplessness for Doctor Jackson's response. And so, also, did those two hideous forms beside me.

"All right, boys," the answer came at last. "And yet," there was a hesitancy in his voice, "and yet I'm sort of curious. You, Buck!" he added, "you come along upstairs with me! I'm going to take a look around the place!" And I heard him start up the steps.

Absolutely motionless, those dead forms stood before me, locked in battle. Then, slowly, before my eyes, the outlines

of the figures became indistinct. Fainter and fainter they grew, until all at once they were no longer visible.

Something stirred inside of me. It was the first beat of my long-stilled heart. As the door flew open and the kindly face of old Doctor Jackson appeared, I lifted myself up a bit, and then fell back in a dead faint. . . .

**I**N the light of the dying day we stood beside the week-old grave: Lillian Holt, dressed in deep black, and myself. The girl stooped and once more kissed the flowers she had placed on the bare mound. Then she rose to her feet.

"Harry," she said, in a low voice, "when he came that time—when I saw him in my dream—whom do you think he meant me to give that message to . . . that message, 'that he was not such a coward, after all?'"

I turned my head and bit my lip.

"Whoever it was, Lillian," I finally replied with difficulty, "I'm sure of one thing: that Tom was braver than that man could ever hope to be!" Gently I took the hand of my best friend's fiancée. "Tom knew what was before him," I said, "and yet he faced it. And that is the bravest thing a man can do!"

And then, together, the girl and I knelt with tear-wet faces beside the lonely grave.