

# 10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Volume Ten

March, 1936

Number Four

## TWO FULL-LENGTH NOVELS OF EERIE MYSTERY

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

## TWO WEIRDLY REALISTIC MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

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

## SHORT TALES OF GRIPPING TERROR

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

—AND—

- Dark Council.....A Department 122

Cover Painting by Tom Lovell

Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell

Published every month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter October 6, 1933, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1936, by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscriptions in U. S. A. \$1.00. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

# CONVICTS FROM HELL

By George Alden Edson

(Author of "Hotel of the Damned," etc.)



*Thousands of volts of electricity swept through his quivering body—and still he sat and hurled vows of vengeance at those whom he deemed his persecutors . . . Nan Raymond and her fiancé trembled but would not believe—until they cowered in the shadow of the black doom he brought back from hell!*

THE city room relaxed after the morning edition had been put to bed. A couple of the boys yawned with much noise and gesticulation. Morey, the city editor, stopped chewing the stub of a dead cigar and puffed actual smoke from a live one. I lit a cigarette myself. Then glancing at Nan Raymond,

who is the only girl working as a straight reporter on the *Daily Examiner* and the only girl in the world so far as I'm concerned, I forced a grin and pushed to my feet.

"Honey," I said when I'd walked across to the desk at which she sat, "let's go make some large whoopee for a bit. I

A Tensely  
Dramatic  
Novelette  
of Eerie  
Doom



feel the need of some strong stimulants.

I did feel the need of it—plenty. I haven't got the stomach of guys like Harry Kent. At nine o'clock that evening he and I had sat in the death house at the prison watching Myron Zorn, the most fiendish criminal and murderer in the history of the city, burn in the electric chair. Now, just a couple of hours later, Harry was cracking jokes with another reporter while I still felt sick as hell.

And I knew Nan didn't feel any too

chipper. I'd loved her long enough to spot her feelings almost at a glance. She had helped get the evidence which had sent Zorn to the chair and, despite the fact that he had deserved death for all the atrocious crimes he had committed, she was upset.

But she answered: "I'd rather go home, Bob. Somehow I couldn't do anything else tonight."

"Okay, darling," I told her. "I'll go along with you. Let's start. . . ."

"Say, I guess you began to wonder if the old buzzard really wasn't going to fulfill his prophecy," Morey, who had sauntered across the room to us, laughed as Nan reached for her hat.

I didn't laugh. To me, with the ghastly vision seared into my memory, what had happened would never be funny. Zorn, a misshapen hulk of flesh with a huge apish head, had scorned assistance to walk the last mile. Entering the death chamber at the end, he had sneered. But suddenly, as he had taken his place in the chair, an expression of insane fury had contorted his face.

"Cut out that damned drivel!" he had snarled at the chaplain who had been reading from his Bible. Then he had swung venomous eyes over the stand in which reporters sat with the state witnesses, fixing them on Harry and me, and said: "Get this—for yourselves and the others on your snooping paper who helped send me here! They can't kill me! And I'll see you all die in hellish agony before I'm satisfied!"

Had I known what I was destined to know, the full horror, those words would have affected me. Not knowing, they hadn't. I had merely thought them the words of a maniac. But those that had followed, or more particularly the circumstances under which they had been uttered, had made my blood freeze.

For the executioner had advanced, attached the two electrodes to the head and leg of the convict who had already been strapped to the chair by guards, stepped back to his instrument board to await the signal of the warden, finally thrown the switch—and *Myron Zorn had repeated his threats!*

OF COURSE the electricity had eventually quieted him. But for a moment, with that awful hum accompanying his voice and the nauseous stench of burned flesh filling the chamber, he had actually resisted death. More incredible, supposedly impossible, he had even remained conscious enough to talk. . . .

So, remembering the horrible picture, I didn't laugh at Morey's crude attempt to be humorous. I just said: "Yes, I did begin to wonder. . . ."

"Maybe he'll return from the grave to get us," Harry Kent suggested, approaching and leaning on Nan's desk. "Wonder how he intended to kill us? Rather an interesting speculation, eh?"

A brilliant newspaperman, Harry Kent, possessed the clever brain to have been great. But he was erratic as he was brilliant, sometimes convivial, sometimes moody, always sardonic. Now, however, I thought I could detect a forced note in his mockery.

"He didn't strike me as a sweet soul who'd forget the agony he promised us," Kent continued. "Perhaps he'd—"

"I—I wonder if he meant me, too," a new voice said nervously.

I glanced over my shoulder and saw that Gramp Hodge had edged up behind me. The "Gramp" was a nickname based not so much on age, for Hodge wasn't fifty, as on manner; he was a crochety bird who appeared with both raincoat and rubbers if one white cloud hung in the sky. Strangely, though, he was the best rewrite man in the office. I gathered that he had grown jittery because he had written several of the stories about Zorn.

"I didn't really help send him to the electric chair." The apologetic whine in his voice made me wonder if he thought Zorn could hear him. "I—I only wrote what you boys told me over the telephone."

"Sure as hell he'll go for you first,"

Morey, the city editor, told him. Then with a raucous hoot: "But I'll lay a hundred to one that even a ghost would get lost in the dust you'd make."

"You can laugh!" Hodge shrilled in quick anger. Almost immediately, however, fear swept back through the gleam of rage which had snapped into his watery eyes. He glanced at Harry, at Nan, finally fixed his gaze on me. His voice quivered with awe as he said: "I've written hundreds of stories about executions. No man ever before talked after the executioner had thrown the switch. No ordinary human being *could* talk. . . . How—how do you explain what happened tonight?"

"Maybe Zorn wasn't human," murmured Harry Kent.

I had chanced to lower my gaze to Nan. I stiffened. For deep in her blue eyes lurked something which wasn't just squeamishness caused by the thought that she had helped send a man to the chair—but fear.

I reached for her arm, said: "Let's go, honey."

She picked up her handbag, rose. Morey and Kent rode down in the elevator with us.

"Old Gramp sure is a pip," Morey muttered, chuckling. "Say, he'll be petrified by the time he gets home."

"And I," Kent announced with his sardonic smirk, "will be petrified long before I get home. G'night, children, I'll see you anon."

He weaved down the street as Morey gave a disgusted snort and ducked into the subway. . . .

**N**AN and I decided to walk to her apartment. For a while she chattered lightly about events of no importance. I waited. And before long, as I'd expected, she swung to what was on her mind.

"I—I don't see how he could have kept repeating his threats of vengeance while—while the electricity . . ." She shuddered.

"I suppose some short in the wires might've lowered the voltage of the current," I told her. "Or perhaps he did have a physical peculiarity which made it less effective at first. Maybe he knew about this peculiarity and was screwy enough to believe he wouldn't die. . . . But what difference? He did."

"I know," Nan murmured. "Yet I've had the wierdest feeling ever since the execution, Bob. A feeling that—well, just that he isn't—dead."

"But of course he is," I argued. And I remembered the hideous sight of Myron Zorn's misshapen body leaping against the straps, straining, finally going limp when the current was cut. I swallowed hard. Yet my voice was hoarse when I added: "I saw him die. Afterwards the prison doctor examined him and pronounced him dead. They put his corpse in a coffin. That was taken away in a hearse for burial by his brother."

"Oh, Bob!" Nan exclaimed with a contrite glance. "I didn't mean to make you remember! Let's talk about something else!"

We didn't, though, because I kept arguing until I had smothered her feeling with logic. She was herself again, a girl packing more vivaciousness than any girl I know, when we reached her apartment. I stayed a few minutes, put in a word about our glowing plans for the future when I could, then kissed her and left.

I started the hike toward my apartment in the lower end of town. The short cut which I always took when I walked led me through a dark residential district. Having temporarily forgotten the horror of the execution in thoughts of the girl I loved, I hummed happily—until I heard the scream.

It was a woman's scream, high and shrill, a shriek of mortal terror. I jolted to an abrupt halt. Almost immediately a second scream followed the first. This one held both terror and pain.

Shaking off the startled numbness which had gripped me, I dashed toward the corner. The second outcry faded to a choked groan of agony. I reached the corner and wheeled into the side street. A woman, face bloody and clothes torn, lay sprawled on the pavement. Beyond her, running swiftly away from the spot, I glimpsed a hunched figure. I raced in pursuit.

He led me across lawns, through mazes of trees and shrubbery, around houses, trying to lose me in the darkness. I managed to hold the same distance between us. But I couldn't gain.

Though he kept twisting his head, peering back at me, I couldn't seem to penetrate the gloom to see his face. . . . Then I did. He had skirted a street lamp, slowed before plunging into an alley between two apartment buildings, cast a quick glance over one shoulder.

Face—God! I felt my whole body go cold even while I ran. It was a ghastly mask of shriveled red skin!

Yet the hideousness of the face wasn't what made me gasp. Something else, something vague but present, caused the shocked sound to tear from my throat.

For the first time I saw that the creature's head was hairless! And then I realized that his features bore a resemblance to those of Myron Zorn!

**T**HE possible significance of this resemblance drove horror—horror and, yes, stark fear—to the very depths of my soul. Yet I didn't stop. I forced myself to keep rushing toward him. And when he twisted his head, plunged into the alley, reason asserted itself in my brain.

Myron Zorn was dead! . . . That this

creature's head had been hairless, like the shaven head of a convict prepared for the chair, and his skin shriveled, like skin which has been terribly burned, didn't prove anything. Nor did the resemblance. And perhaps I had even imagined it. Myron Zorn was dead! . . .

I had reached the mouth of the alley. Thick blackness shut down on me with the next step. For a short distance I groped my way, then halted and stiffened. A clammy chill oozed over me.

From far ahead a mocking laugh had floated back to my ears. . . .

After a moment I turned to grope my way out of the alley again. Reason had killed my fear; that wasn't why I quit the chase. I just realized the uselessness of it. The creature had given me the slip—and a woman, needing aid if she wasn't dead, lay back there on the side street.

She wasn't dead. A few people who had heard her screams, including a cop, had gathered. Two of them were starting to carry her into the nearest house. I trailed along with the others.

She recovered consciousness in the house. She wasn't badly hurt, just scratched and terrified. Her story, which she told in a shaky voice, was that a degenerate had jumped at her from the bushes as she was walking home. She tried to describe him.

The policeman and the others obviously thought her description exaggerated until, without referring to my momentary impression that the creature had resembled Myron Zorn, I told my story.

"Must've been burned in a fire," the cop grunted. "The burns probably drove him nuts."

The others agreed. . . .

A few minutes later, after the cop had telephoned the description to police headquarters, I borrowed the phone. The woman, it seemed, was the wife of a local politician. Names make news. The yarn

was worth more than a stick on the third page.

I gave the facts to the rewrite on the night trick at the office. Finishing, I made sure he had everything and started to hang up. But the rewrite caught me. In an excited tone he told me he, too, had some news.

And he did—news which caused cold sweat to ooze from my pores.

Ared Zorn, Myron Zorn's brother, had claimed the corpse after the execution and carried it away in a hearse for burial. There had been a driver and himself. Just a short while ago he had appeared at a farmhouse on the lonely road from the prison to the city, bruised and disheveled, and frantically called the police. He had told them, when they arrived, that the hearse had gone over a bank. He had been knocked unconscious. Later, recovering, he had seen that the coffin was on the ground near him instead of in the hearse—open and empty!

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Man With the Burned Head*

I GOT to the office very early the next morning. From Morey I learned that the night city editor had sent leg men to check on the accident. They had reported that the police hadn't found any clues as to what had become of the corpse.

"The driver of the hearse was in such tough shape that he couldn't explain what had caused the accident," Morey told me. "Neither can Zorn. . . . The old man wants us to play up the stuff Myron Zorn jabbered about how he wouldn't die." An expression of disgust swept over Morey's face. "To give the yarn a little of the spooky stuff. Make a hell of a lot out of the fact that Zorn didn't fry like a prime cut. . . . Nuts!"

The old man, as we called the recent

owner of the *Daily Examiner*, loved sensationalism.

"Well, I suppose he's the boss," Morey sighed. "But sometimes he gives me a pain in the kohunkus. . . . You amble out to Ared Zorn's and see if he's more coherent about things after a snooze, Bob. Then go to the Clarke Memorial Hospital and quiz the guy who drove the hearse. His name is Dennis."

"Okay," I said.

Suddenly Morey laughed, exclaimed: "Say, I've got it—Hodge! How he's going to quake when he hears about the corpse disappearing! He'll get the old man's spooky stuff into the yarn without trying. . . . Here he comes!"

I looked toward the door. And there was Hodge, umbrella on his arm, shuffling into the office. His haggard face and his bloodshot eyes told of a sleepless night—and I couldn't help a little feeling of pity for the poor cuss.

He wasn't three steps inside the door before Harry Kent started to give him the new development. I didn't listen long, however, for I saw that Nan had arrived while I'd been talking with Morey. She looked pale, frightened. I went over to her desk.

"Hello, honey," I said with a grin which was supposed to make things look less ominous to her.

But it didn't work. Staring at me with anxious eyes, she quavered: "I met Walter Keller in the hall. He told me all about what's happened. . . . Oh, Bob! The—the feeling I had last night was stronger this morning even before I heard. And now . . . !"

"You mustn't let your nerves get you, darling," I said in an insistent voice. "Somebody stole the corpse. It *was* a corpse. You know that. And corpses don't come to life."

"I—I know," Nan mumbled. "I just can't help—"

"What do you think happened to the body, Lake?" a voice asked.

I glanced over one shoulder to see Walter Keller sidle up to us. He was the old man's nephew, a thin chap with sallow cheeks and receding chin, who had begun as a cub reporter to learn the racket because he figured he'd inherit the paper at the old man's death.

"I think it was stolen," I grunted curtly. I was sore because he'd been the one to tell Nan that Zorn's corpse had vanished from its coffin—unreasonably, of course, since someone else would have told her if he hadn't. But, like the other boys, I guess I even resented Keller's existence; he was too much of a parasite.

"Who would have stolen it?" he countered. A superior expression crept over his face. "Electricity is a strange force. I happen to know more about it than the rest of you in this office. I've studied it . . . and the related psychic forces. Now I have a theory that Myron Zorn actually has—"

"Bunk!" I snapped. "Neither of us are interested!"

With a sullen frown Keller slouched away. . . .

"Listen, kid," I continued to Nan, "don't let dopes like him feed you any screwy theories. That feeling of yours comes from being upset because you dug up some of the evidence used to send Zorn to the chair. But you don't need to be upset. He was a rat who deserved to die. Just remember the helpless women he tortured to death."

Nan shuddered.

"I've got to go have a chat with Ared Zorn," I told her. "Keep a stiff upper lip, honey. . . . See you soon."

**L**EAVING the office, I jumped into a cab. Ared Zorn, a bachelor who had once been a professor at the university and had retired to do private research

work, lived on the outskirts of the city. I gave the driver the address and lit myself a cigarette.

The question Walter Keller had asked had been sticking in my crop ever since I'd had the news from the rewrite over the phone last night: Who would have stolen that corpse? I couldn't think of anybody. Yet obviously the corpse had been stolen; nothing else could have happened.

For a few minutes after hearing the news, however, I hadn't been so sure nothing else had happened. The fact that the hideous hairless creature had seemed to resemble Myron Zorn had been less easy to forget with Zorn's body actually gone from its coffin. In the end, though, I had managed to make my reason stifle the wild ideas in my head. . . .

Within ten minutes we reached Ared Zorn's house. It was a gloomy old place, set far back from the street, surrounded by trees and unkempt shrubbery. I told the cabby to wait, went up the walk, knocked.

An old crone with a wrinkled parchment face opened the door. She gave me a hostilely questioning stare.

"I'm Robert Lake of the *Daily Examiner*," I said with a cheery smile. "I'd like to see Mr. Zorn."

She said: "Humph."

But she told me to wait, closed the door and eventually reappeared. As if doing anything for me caused her acute agony, she motioned me into a musty hall and led me to a mustier room at the end.

Ared Zorn sat in a stiff chair behind a desk littered with books and papers. Unlike his monstrous brother, he was rather a fine looking man. He had a thin ascetic face, studious grey eyes, grey hair.

"Good morning," I said in the tone I reserve for people from whom I want to get something to print. "I hope that



you're recovering after your unfortunate accident."

He nodded but offered no comment.

"We thought you might possibly remember more about the accident this morning," I continued. "I mean about the cause."

He shook his head, muttered: "No. I wasn't watching the road as we went down that hill. Suddenly we skidded—" he gave a little shudder—"and then there was a terrible crash. I felt myself being hurled from the seat. . . . That's all I remember."

"You regained consciousness to find your brother's coffin on the ground near you—open and empty," I said. I made my voice casual. "Do you have any idea what might have happened to the body?"

"Do I—have any—idea?" He repeated my words in a hoarse whisper. Then quickly, nervously: "No—no, I don't."

I waited a moment before I asked: "Do you recollect that your brother had any physical peculiarity which might have made him partially impervious to electrical shocks?"

Ared Zorn stared at me, a puzzled expression on his face, but back in his grey eyes I thought I could detect a furtive look. He ran his tongue over dry lips.

"No, I don't recollect any such peculiarity," he said, shifting in his chair.

I waited another moment before, still very casually, I murmured: "You've gone deeply into electricity with your psychological researches, haven't you?"

"Only a—a little," Ared Zorn mumbled.

"Do you think such a peculiarity possible?"

"I—I couldn't say." He raised one shaky hand, swathed in bandages, and pressed the fingers along his forehead. "I'm afraid you must excuse me now. I—I feel too faint to talk."

"Of course," I told him solicitously. "Thank you for seeing me at all."

I went to the door and, as I stepped into

the hall, cast one quick glance over my shoulder. His eyes were fixed on me. . . .

**U**SHERED out by the sullen housekeeper, I returned to my waiting cab and ordered the driver to take me to the Clarke Memorial Hospital. During the trip I thought about the brief interview with Ared Zorn.

Obviously he had hedged on the questions concerning electricity; they had seemed to put him on his guard against admitting something. I wondered what. And I wondered why he had been so nervous when I had asked him if he had any idea what had become of the corpse of his brother. I suspected he did have an idea. . . .

Arriving at the hospital, I went into the reception room and asked about the man who had driven the hearse. He was too badly injured to talk any more, the nurse told me, so I rode back to the office.

I looked for Nan, couldn't find her—and then Morey shouted to me.

"Get over to the Cramer mansion," he ordered, cradling the receiver of one of the battery of phones on his desk. "The caretaker just called the police. His wife was murdered last night. He claims he was bound and couldn't get free until morning. . . . God, this ought to please the old man!"

The Cramer mansion was one of those brownstone atrocities built in the nineties. I argued my way past the cop on guard at the door, pushed into the hall and followed the sound of voices into a big room to the right.

Inspector Murphy grunted at sight of me. He and two other plainclothes men were grouped around a quivering old guy with an ashen face and anguished eyes.

Then I felt the inside of me go hollow.

The woman lay on the floor near one corner. She had been strangled to death. Her face, framed by disheveled grey hair,

was bloated and blue. Her glazed eyes bulged from their sockets.

"I—I tell you I didn't do it!" the old guy shrilled the protestation in an hysterical voice. "You must believe me! I didn't! One of them did it! . . . They jumped on me when I came into the room. They bound me and gagged me. There's the rope, the gag." He pointed to some rope and a wad of cloth on the floor. "They opened the safe and took everything—all the jewels. Then she—my wife—came downstairs looking for me and . . . Oh God!"

For a moment the poor old devil shook with sobs. But finally he managed to continue:

"One of them strangled her before she could utter a single cry! Strangled her to death . . . right here in front of me!"

"And do you still insist they looked like corpses?" Inspector Murphy grunted in a sarcastic voice.

"Two of them *were* corpses! I could smell the stench of the grave on them! And their faces . . . God, they were horrible! . . . The third—the fiend who murdered my wife—was a monster with a hairless head and a ghastly face that looked as if it had been burned!"

Jerking taut, I pushed toward the caretaker.

"A face that looked as if it had been burned!" I echoed. "What time did this happen?"

"About three o'clock, sir," he quavered. "I heard some noises and came to investigate. The Cramers had all gone away on a trip and left part of the family jewelry in the safe. The servants were on vacations. . . . Just about three o'clock. But I couldn't get loose to call the police until this morning."

"I think he's telling the truth, Murphy," I said to the inspector. "This monster with the burned face must be the degenerate who assaulted that woman about

twelve o'clock last night. I chased him and saw him. The description fits perfectly."

"Say, it does!" Murphy exclaimed. "I'd forgotten about him. Maybe you're right and the story is the truth." Suddenly he frowned. "But the two who looked like corpses. What the hell are they?"

"I don't know," I muttered unsteadily.

I tightened my lips. The monster who had so fiendishly strangled this poor old woman must be the hideous creature I had chased—the creature who had resembled Myron Zorn. Between midnight and three o'clock he had acquired two accomplices who looked like living corpses. . . .

Good God, what hellish horror stalked the city?

**D**URING the whole trip back to the office I drove my reason at the nameless dread within me. Again I told myself that the creature's uncanny resemblance to Myron Zorn meant nothing. Great Heaven, it couldn't! And, of course, the other two the caretaker had claimed were corpses weren't corpses. That was equally impossible.

But what the devil was the gag . . . and why?

Reaching the office, I found Morey having himself a private laugh over something. He called to me. I glanced at Nan's desk, saw she wasn't there, and went over to the city desk."

"This is rich," Morey told me. "Gramp Hodge and dear nephew Walter have been working on the old man. First Gramp feeds him on how Myron Zorn must've been superhuman to have talked after they poured the juice into him. Then Keller feeds him a few crazy theories on how electricity controls life and death. Between 'em they've got the old man believing that Zorn either didn't really die

or has returned from the dead. . . . And is he scared!"

Morey had another laugh, then wiped his eyes and asked me what I'd got. I told him—still withholding the fact that I'd thought the degenerate resembled Myron Zorn.

But such a fantastic story was on the books, it seemed, without any help from me.

"The old man, on the strength of his nephew's fantastic electrical theories, already figures Zorn has cheated the grave and is committing every crime in the city," Morey said. Then he frowned. "Say, this one could give a guy the creeps if he let his imagination play with it. A fiendish killer with a hairless head and a burned face . . . and two henchmen the caretaker swears were walking corpses. That could give a guy the creeps, couldn't it?"

"It could," I murmured.

And suddenly, for just a moment, an uncertain gleam penetrated the hardness of Morey's eyes. Then he snorted as if disgusted at himself.

"Did you get anything from Ared Zorn or the driver of the hearse?" he demanded.

I told about my interview with Ared Zorn.

"Well, you better see the old man before you write your yarns," Morey said after I'd finished. "He wants to have finger in every angle of this case. You'll probably find him mumbling prayers in his beard."

"Anybody in his office now?" I asked.

"I don't know. I never know since he had that second door cut through into the back hall. Hodge went out to get a prescription for his nerves. Keller finally started off on his morning assignment." And half under his breath Morey grumbled: "Swell fun to have the owner's nephew for a cub. . . ."

I went across the door of the old man's

private office and knocked. There wasn't any answer. I knocked again, louder, because the old man is deaf. Still no answer—and I pushed the door open.

The ghastly sight which met my gaze made every muscle in my body snap as stiff as a steel rod. The blood in my veins congealed. Horror rocked my senses.

For the old man, his face purple and eyes glassy, sat slumped low against the back of his desk chair—strangled to death!

## CHAPTER THREE

### Discovery in the Cemetery

**D**URING the rest of that day, that night and the next day, the horror I had felt increased a hundredfold and spread throughout the city. For crime after crime, usually a robbery with someone murdered and yet someone else left alive to tell the tale, was committed. And always the someone else left alive told a gruesome tale of a monster with a hairless head, burned face, and two accomplices who looked like living corpses.

The murder of the owner of the *Daily Examiner*, coupled with the fact that Myron Zorn's body had disappeared from its coffin when the hearse had been wrecked, convinced people the monster was Zorn. The inability of the police to find clues pointing to any other murderer was even further proof. Either still alive or returned from the dead, Zorn had risen from his coffin and begun to carry out the threats he had uttered in the death chamber.

Tonight, the second night after the old man's murder, stark terror gripped the city. Since dark the streets had been nearly deserted. Those few forced to be abroad, their eyes wide with fear, clung to patches of light.

Of course we whom Zorn had treat-

ened, they muttered to each other, were doomed. That was certain. But that wasn't all. No one else was safe. . . .

At about eleven o'clock, as usual, we put the paper to bed. Newspapers can't just die with their owners. Besides, the *Daily Examiner* already had a new owner—the old man's nephew, Walter Keller.

His expectations had proved to be sound; he had been the old man's sole beneficiary. Now, his sallow face flushed with excitement, he stood beside Morey at the city desk.

"This first article of mine will send the circulation soaring," he gloated. "I've advanced the theory that some of the mysterious forces of electricity are really psychic forces. Therefore a man killed by electricity doesn't die as other men die. His mind still possesses extraordinary psychic powers—powers which indubitably allow him to raise his physical corpse from the grave."

Morey glowered.

"And I've advanced the theory that Myron Zorn has returned from the grave. He died—yes—but not as other men die. . . . Scientists in this country will send my article all over the world to contemporary scientists!" The flush in Keller's cheeks grew brighter. "Now I'm having my chance to make all my theories on the relation of electricity to the psychic world heard!"

"You sound glad your uncle was killed," Morey muttered.

"No—no, I'm very sorry!" Keller protested quickly. "But this phenomenon *has* given me an opportunity to . . ."

I didn't listen any longer. Though not even able to muster a smile for her, I dragged myself wearily over to Nan's desk. She sat there, her pretty face pale and drawn, still intent on that conceited fool's ranting.

"Please don't be bothered by the bunk he spouts," I begged. "He's crazy."

"I—I wonder," Nan husked. Then she lifted fearful eyes. "The prison doctor swears Myron Zorn was dead when he examined him. Yet who can this man with the burned face be except Myron Zorn? Who else would commit such brutal murders? Who else would have killed Mr. Keller?"

"I don't know," I answered frankly. "But I do know the fiend can't be Zorn. I saw Zorn die. The prison doctor swears he did die. That means he's still dead."

"Yet three people he's tortured and left alive have recognized him," Nan quavered. "And those two corpses . . . ? They've both been recognized as Zorn's two henchmen who were electrocuted last month. And why would they have tortured the man who sent them to the electric chair if they hadn't been the ones who wanted revenge?"

Earlier in the evening a man who had been instrumental in sending Myron Zorn's two henchmen to the chair had been assaulted. But instead of being killed, he had been horribly tortured and left alive to suffer. He had claimed that he had recognized the faces of his torturers. The police, however, had held that terror inspired by newspaper stories had made him imagine he recognized them. . . .

"I don't know," I muttered again.

God, if only I did know! Ever since the old man had been murdered, with the exception of two hours sleep which sheer exhaustion had demanded, I had sought for some way to smash the horror gripping the city—sought in vain. If only I could get a lead!

"I wonder whose turn's next," a sardonic voice said.

Harry Kent had appeared from somewhere. He draped one leg over the corner of Nan's desk.

"Let's see," he continued, "there're five of us left in the top flight of workers on this rag who helped push Zorn so rudely

into the hot squat: Nan, you, me, Morey and Hodge. I wonder which will—"

"Stow it, Kent!" I snapped.

"But I—"

"God!" a young reporter burst into the city room. "I—something—something terrible—" He choked.

"Come on, come on, what's the matter?" Morey bellowed.

"In the vacant lot back of the building—I just found—Gramp Hodge!" The young reporter swallowed. "He's been—strangled to death!"

"And now," Kent murmured softly, "there are only four of us. . . ."

NAN uttered a little whimper, swayed to her feet, clutched my arm. A hard groan rattled from my own throat. Hideous thoughts streamed through my brain. This tragedy, the horror of it added to the horror of the last two days, rocked the reason to which I had clung so desperately.

First the old man—and now Hodge! Good God, the fiend *was* carrying out the threat Myron Zorn had made in the death chamber! But that didn't really prove anything. . . . I tried to pin myself to logic. The fiend couldn't be Zorn—couldn't!

Yet the dreadful uncertainty in my mind wouldn't be stifled. He looked like Zorn. Other people beside myself had noticed the resemblance. And a person who should know had sworn that the two accomplices were Zorn's two henchmen who had been electrocuted last month.

"And now there are only four of us!"

Harry Kent's words kept pounding through the back of my head. Only four of us: Kent, Morey, myself—and Nan! And Nan might be next! My whole body trembled.

Morey, Kent, Keller and most of the others who had been in the office crowded

toward the door. Morbid curiosity had conquered the revulsion they knew the sight of poor Hodge would cause.

Realizing there was no use in trying to catch this fiend by chasing wildly around the city, I stayed with Nan.

"Bob . . . !" Her voice was hoarse. "He's the second! The—the murderer is Myron Zorn . . . returned from the grave for his revenge!"

"You mustn't believe that." I whispered. I swung one arm around her and drew her close to me. "It's impossible—utterly impossible."

If only I could believe beyond any doubt what I was attempting to make her believe . . . !

She clung to me, her eyes wide and terrified, her face even paler.

I had to do something! I had to get this monster before he could kill Nan! Kill the girl I loved—God! At the thought my heart congealed into a cold weight of fear in my breast. But what could I do? I didn't know what I was hunting—a man or a thing. . . .

Morey had returned to the city room. He muttered: "I'd better call the police. Though I don't suppose they'll be able to do any more this time than—"

"Morey," I interrupted, leaving Nan and meeting him at his desk, "I've got to be gone a little while. Will you guard Nan until I come back again?"

"Why — sure," Morey answered. "Where're you—"

"I can't tell you," I said. "It may not mean anything at all. . . . Will you keep her in your sight every minute?"

"Sure, Bob, sure," he promised.

I crossed to Nan and told her to stick to Morey. She, too, wanted to know where I was going. I repeated what I had answered Morey.

"But something may happen to you!" Sudden panic swept into her voice. She

grabbed my elbow. "The fiend may—"

"Don't worry, honey," I said gruffly. Then I pulled away from her and hurried down to the door.

**T**HERE wasn't even a cab in front of the office; I had to go two blocks before I found one parked in the bright light of a street lamp. The driver's face was pinched with fear.

"Brooklawn Cemetery," I ordered.

He stiffened in his seat.

"Come on—let's get going," I said.

Reluctantly he kicked his starter, meshed the gears, wheeled out from the curb. I lit a cigarette and dragged in a couple of nervous puffs of smoke.

I had to *know* who was executing Myron Zorn's threats. It couldn't be Zorn. Logic told me it couldn't . . . but I had to be convinced beyond the power of mere logic.

I had to have actual proof!

In about fifteen minutes we reached the nearest corner of the cemetery. I had the driver take me along to the main gate and the caretaker's lodge.

"Wait for me," I commanded as I stepped to the ground.

I left him while he was still whining a frightened protest, walked up to the door of the lodge, knocked. After a few moments a wizened old man inched the door open.

"I'm a detective from headquarters," I lied. I didn't want to waste time on argument about what I wished him to do for me. "I've got orders to inspect the Jorret family tomb. . . . Here's a ten to pay you for the trouble of coming to unlock it."

Terror had snapped into the old man's rheumy eyes at the mention of the name Jorret. But avarice crawled through the terror when he caught sight of money. A gnarled hand seized the bill.

"Come this way." He gestured for me

to enter. "I'll get the key and a light."

Turning, he hunched out of the room. Presently he returned with a lantern, motioned for me to follow, led me through to a door giving directly into the cemetery from the rear of the house. We started along a walk between lines of ghostly white headstones.

Arthur Jorret, one of Myron Zorn's two henchmen who had been electrocuted last month, had come from a good family. He had been a kid of twenty when he had fallen under the insidious influence of Zorn. Last month, when he had been executed at the age of only twenty-five for the vicious murder of a young girl, his family had won a bitter fight with the authorities of this cemetery over their right to put his body in the old family vault. . . .

"Here's the tomb ye want," the caretaker croaked. Then fearfully: "Ye—ye don't think ye're going to find anything wrong? Ye don't think them stories in the newspapers is true?"

"I don't know," I muttered grimly. "Has anybody visited this tomb within the past three days?"

"Not—not to my knowledge," the caretaker answered.

"Does anyone else have a key?"

He shook his head.

I drew in a slow breath, said: "Okay. Let's have a look."

He fumbled in his coat pocket, produced a bunch of keys on a ring, held them close to the lantern. Separating one with a shaky hand, he pushed it into the lock. He raised the lantern as he turned it. I could see the muscles in his wizened face twitch.

My own face was set; the skin felt tight. The inside of me had gone hollow. A clammy chill of dread because of what we might find crawled up my spine.

Presently, withdrawing the key, the caretaker pulled at the huge iron door. It creaked open. Dank air, filled with a nauseous odor, swirled out of the tomb.

"I—I ain't going in there," the caretaker rasped. "Ye can have the lantern."

"Where's Arthur Jorret's coffin?" I asked.

"The—the bottom one on the right."

Taking the lantern, I stepped into the tomb and turned to the right. The bottom coffin. My eyes flicked down the tier. That one there. . . .

I froze. Breath oozed between my lips with a hissing sound. My left hand, which held the lantern, trembled and made the light flicker.

For the cover of that bottom coffin had been removed—and it was empty!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Death in False-Face

I HARDLY remember stumbling from that tomb. The ghastly significance of the empty coffin had driven the capability of clear thought from my brain. As if I had dreamed the actions, I dimly recollect locking the door of the tomb for the terrified caretaker and hurrying with him down to his lodge. I recollect that he begged me to take him to the city and that I assented.

During the ride my mind whirled with horror. I had come to the cemetery to prove that, because Arthur Jorret's body was in its coffin, one of the supposedly resurrected corpses was a fake. That would mean that the other supposed corpse and the creature who resembled Myron Zorn were also fakes.

But now . . . !

"Faster—faster!" I shouted to the driver of the cab.

I sat tense on the edge of the seat. The thing I had believed impossible might be true! Keller's theories, which I had considered so ridiculous, might be correct! . . . How was I going to protect Nan? How could I guard her from a creature

with power to bring not only himself but others back to life?

Despair clutched my heart.

Yet I must! I clenched my fists. Somehow I must—and would!

Now we had reached the center of the city. There was little traffic; we careened down the main street and jolted to a stop in front of the office.

I jumped out to the sidewalk, the old caretaker of the cemetery following me, then I heard brakes scream and a hoarse voice shout my name. I wheeled to see a burly form lurch from a second cab.

Morey! And he was alone!

"Where's Nan?" I shouted at him.

"I took her to—" he choked.

Suddenly I noticed that his shirt front was drenched with blood. He started to sag; I sprang toward him and caught him. I saw that his eyes, which were usually so hard and cynical, were glassy with horror.

"God, Morey . . . tell me what's happened to her," I said huskily.

"I—I thought she wasn't safe in the office after the others left," he muttered unsteadily. "I knew she wouldn't be safe either at her home or mine. The killer was after both of us. So I took her to a friend's house. The—the friend wasn't there. We went around to try to find a window unlocked and—and—" His voice cracked. Then: "It is Zorn! I saw him! He glided out of the darkness and stabbed me! He must've taken Nan! I came to . . . and she was gone!"

Those last words almost destroyed the final vestige of sanity in my mind. The fiend had Nan! I had left her—and he had struck! An agonized groan tore from my throat.

But he hadn't killed her! I seized at that tiny hope. He would have done it on the spot. No, he must have taken her somewhere. He must have wanted to use her to satisfy his . . . Desperately I stifled

the hideous thought of his reason for letting her live. Thinking about that would drive me completely insane. And I must keep my head!

Where would he have taken her? Who might know? I could think of just one possible person—Ared Zorn. I rushed back to my cab and shouted Ared Zorn's address to the driver.

After a ride which seemed interminable we reached the gloomy house on the outskirts of the city. Again I ordered my driver to wait for me. I ran up the path.

All the windows in the front were black. I rang the bell. No answer. I tried the door. To my surprise I found it unlocked. I flung it open.

The hall inside was dark. But dim light filtered through the doorway from the room in which I had interviewed Ared Zorn a couple of days ago.

"Zorn!" I shouted, hurrying toward it.

The sound of my voice echoed through the house and faded into silence. There was no response. I reached the doorway—and stopped short.

Ared Zorn sat in the stiff chair behind his littered desk. He stared at me with sightless eyes. He was dead. His blue face told the story. Like the others, he had been strangled.

I uttered a low moan of despair. The only one who might have told me where to find the girl I loved—dead. Dear God, how could I ever find her now?

If the creature really were Myron Zorn, if he had the power to return from the grave, how could I ever have hoped to save Nan? If a ghastly hoax were being perpetrated . . . I stiffened. In this moment of deepest despair my brain began to work. Yes, it was possible that the whole business had been a fiendish hoax! Cold sweat oozed from my pores.

All other angles could have been faked. And Myron Zorn's ability to live after the executioner had thrown the switch

. . . A person who knew a little about electricity could have managed even that.

God, why hadn't I thought of this long ago!

Twisting about, I rushed out of the house and down to my cab. I shouted an address to the driver. . . .

THE address was a dilapidated warehouse down near the waterfront. But on the roof of the unused building, I knew from several visits there in the past, was a bizarre penthouse. It was reached by stairs from a door part way up the alley at one side of the building.

I told the driver to stop at the nearest corner. I didn't want to advertise my arrival. Leaping out before the cab had even come to a complete stop, I ran down the street and ducked into the alley.

Just how I was going to get inside the building I didn't know. The door, of course, would be locked. But perhaps I could find a window. . . .

Then, before I had taken more than a dozen steps up the alley, it happened.

I didn't hear any sound. I just saw the hideous white face appear out of the darkness to my right. I tried to wheel and swing a fist. Something crashed down on my head. I felt my legs buckle.

For a few moments I managed to cling to consciousness. Vaguely, though my flaccid muscles refused to obey commands to resist, I realized that a second figure with a white face had appeared and that the two of them were lifting me. They carried me into the building. But instead of taking me up toward the penthouse they carried me down some stairs into a dank cellar.

Then I passed out. . . .

I opened my eyes to a scene which made horror grip my whole being. I was lying on the floor of a dimly lighted little chamber filled with the nauseous odor of rotted flesh. Near me stood two



creatures whose faces were partially decomposed.

God, they *must* be living corpses! And one of them—I felt my sanity slip again—did have the recognizable features of Arthur Jorret!

Yet that wasn't the full extent of the horror. I heard a voice husk my name. Twisting my head, I uttered a stricken cry.

For in another part of the chamber, a dull black suit hanging from his hunched form, stood the hairless monster whose shriveled red face resembled the face of Myron Zorn! And on the floor by his feet, half her clothes stripped from her body, lay Nan!

"Bob. . . !" Anguish showed through the terror in her eyes. "Oh God . . . now he's got you!"

The sight of her lying there, half naked, with that hellish monster standing over her, made insane fury surge up within me. Frenziedly I tried to leap to my feet. Only then did I realize my wrists and ankles were bound. I strained at the bonds.

"I decided not to kill you—yet," the monster said in a rasping voice. He chuckled. "Of course I shall kill you. The threats must be carried out. But first I wanted to give you the pleasure of watching a little drama, since you so unfortunately happened to be in this vicinity . . . You've noticed that I also spared the dear lady. She's too beautiful to die before I have the joy of—"

"You damned fiend!" I raged.

The monster chuckled again, mockingly, nodded to his two gruesome henchmen and rasped: "I don't need you here. Do the job we planned without me."

Silently they shuffled out of the chamber.

"Now," the monster croaked, bending toward Nan, "the little drama can begin. . . ."

I WENT through the lowest hell of torture during the moments that followed. Nan, moaning in horror, tried to cringe away from the monster's foul hands. But she, too, was bound; she couldn't escape them. His chuckles lowering to obscenely lascivious sounds, he ripped at the rest of her clothes.

I kept tugging frantically at my bonds. The rope around my wrists slashed through the skin and let warm blood trickle down over my hands. But I was numb to pain.

God, I had to get free! That monstrous fiend couldn't have Nan! I had to save her!

The rope around my wrists seemed to have loosened a little. If only I had more time. But in a few instants it would be too late. . . .

Suddenly a desperate idea flashed into my mind. I was near a jutting corner of stone wall. Perhaps I could use that for a crude knife. . . . I hitched myself back toward it.

The creature was so absorbed with Nan that he didn't notice. Reaching the corner, I lifted my arms and sawed at the rope.

My wrists jerked free!

Hope welled up within me. I tore at the bonds around my ankles. . . .

"You would, eh?"

The monster snarled those words just as I got the bonds loose. He whipped a knife from under his black coat and lunged at me. I had clawed to my knees. I came to my feet with both fists swinging. One missed; the other smashed into the hideous face.

But in the split second before it landed I saw, at this close range, that the face was only a clever mask! My suspicion had been correct!

The fiend rocked back a step. Then, swiftly, he caught his balance and sprang at me again. I ducked. Too late. The

blade of his knife dug into my shoulder—and I felt life flow out of me.

I heard Nan scream.

"Oh, darling," I sobbed as I sagged to the floor. "My darling. . ."

I didn't lose consciousness. But I lay there, limp and helpless, while the fiend pulled off the skull cap which had made his head look hairless and the broken mask which had covered his face. The features that had been concealed were those of Harry Kent.

They were twisted into a characteristically sardonic sneer. But his eyes, which had always seemed devoid of any real emotion, weren't the eyes of the Harry Kent we all had known; they burned with sadistic cruelty.

"You've signed her death warrant," he said. "I'd had an idea of pretending to save her in the end if she suited me. With the money I'll have in another couple of days I could've taken her on one hell of a spree. I've always had a yen for her."

"Harry . . . you're the monster!" Nan husked in an incredulous voice.

"Good God, Kent, are you mad?" I exclaimed. "You can't get away with this!"

"Can't?" He shrugged. "I have."

"But why are you doing it?" I asked. I tried to stall for time by inducing him to talk. I knew he was egotistical enough to want to brag. And perhaps, in a minute of rest, I could regain a little strength.

"Why? First, for money." An avacious gleam mingled with the cruelty in his eyes. "I want a lot of money. That's why I went in with Zorn as a secret partner a year ago. With my tips we had chances to make a lot. But then he fried. I couldn't save him. But I made him think I was going to save him at the end. That's why he was so brave in the death chamber and so free with his threats."

KENT laughed. "He thought I'd fix the chair so he couldn't burn. He figured they'd have to let him go free as a man legally dead. I did fix the chair. When I got access to the death chamber on the pretext of writing an article I put some colorless lacquer impregnated with asbestos on the electrodes. Sure, I fixed the chair—so he'd burn slow and leave the stage set for my act."

He paused to give me a moment to comprehend his diabolical brilliance. I kept drawing in deep breaths of air to clear my head.

"It's a pretty good act, isn't it?" He fondled the hilt of his knife. "My two helpers arranged the wreck of the hearse by putting a log in the road. They took Zorn's corpse from the coffin and hid it. We even stole the corpses of Zorn's two known henchmen from cemeteries to make everything convince the most skeptical snooper. Then the masks—those were real masterpieces. Dim light and receptive minds made them plenty convincing. A touch of genius for my helpers were the clothes from the corpses we stole. They gave the authentic smell."

I flexed my muscles.

"Finally, all that was needed was to have ourselves identified. It was quite simple. I began by assaulting a few people on the streets. Then I started to execute Zorn's threats. That was a pleasure in the old man's case. In fact, I found I got quite a kick out of murder—though I will hate to kill Nan." He sighed. "But now it must be done. That is . . . soon."

My fists clenched.

"My helpers tortured the man who sent Zorn's two real henchmen to the chair in order to identify themselves. I tried the same thing on Ared Zorn tonight to make my identity stronger. But he was too shrewd and had to die. When we committed a robbery we usually committed a murder—to create the horror. What

we wanted, and got, was a city so terrified that we could have access to any building and yet be in no danger. We—”

I couldn't stand any more of that fiendish story. Drawing in a quick breath, I pulled myself to my knees and threw myself at Kent's legs.

I took him by surprise. He toppled to the floor as he whipped the knife down at me. I managed to catch his wrist, wrench it, grab the knife with my other hand.

Then I stabbed him in the heart. . . .

I hardly remember what happened after that; I had almost shot my bolt. But somehow I did manage to free Nan. Together with her holding me up most of the way, we stumbled out of the place before Kent's two "corpses" returned. We found my cab still waiting. As soon as I got inside, I passed out cold.

\* \* \*

I came to in the hospital. Nan, a tender smile on her face, was sitting beside the bed. I signaled for a kiss.

"You're going to be all right, dear," she whispered to me afterwards. There was a catch in her voice.

"Of course I am, silly," I said. "I've got a claim on the most beautiful girl in the world and I'm sticking around to collect. . . Did the cops capture Kent's two men?"

She told me they had. Later, when she

figured I had recovered enough to talk, she asked: "How did you ever find me? How did you come to suspect Harry Kent?"

"I should've suspected him long before I did," I grunted. "First, I began to believe in the hoax. When Morey, whom Kent failed to kill in his hurry to get you, told me you were gone, I went to Ared Zorn's. He'd acted so nervous that I figured he must know something. But I guess his nervousness was just fear that his brother really had returned to life. Then, when I found Ared Zorn dead, I came to my senses. The most convincing thing about the hoax was Myron Zorn's living after the switch had been thrown. Suddenly I remembered that Kent had been in the death chamber alone and that he knew enough about electricity to fix the chair. It occurred to me such a hoax would be a typical product of his clever but warped mind. So I came to his penthouse—or rather, his cellar."

I caught my breath after all that talking.

"Free speech is not one of my beliefs," I said with a grin. "How about paying for the one I just made?"

She lowered her head to pay.

"And, honey," I whispered in a minute, "let's forget the whole horror. Let's catch up on happiness."

She nodded.

THE END