

# SPICY MYSTERY

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STORIES  
for  
JULY

A woman with blonde, curly hair is running through a graveyard at night. She is wearing a red dress with a white waistband and a black cape. She has a determined expression and is looking back over her shoulder. Her right hand is raised in a fist, and her left hand is holding a glowing lantern. The background shows tombstones and a dark, starry sky.

**CORPSELESS  
COFFIN** *by*  
*Carl Moore*

# SPICY MYSTERY STORIES

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# CORPSELESS

*The gypsy girl had cast a spell of madness on him . . . madness for her. And under the enchantment he no longer loved his wife, but arose in the night to follow a dead girl's vraith to the coffin*

**Y**OUNG HARGROVE was a little drunken when he parked the car. So much so that Joe Carson, his best friend, was worried. He looked at the sinister old cottage, sitting far back in the pines, looked at the crooked path



winding to the ramshackle door, and wondered if Hargrove could make it. Hargrove took another pull at the bottle, said a trifle unsteadily, "I won't be long, Joe. But I'm a little shaky."

Joe answered sympathetically, "I don't blame you! I'd hate to face the little wildcat myself."

Hargrove grunted. "Somebody has to tell her and it's up to me. Guess I should never have gotten mixed up with her,

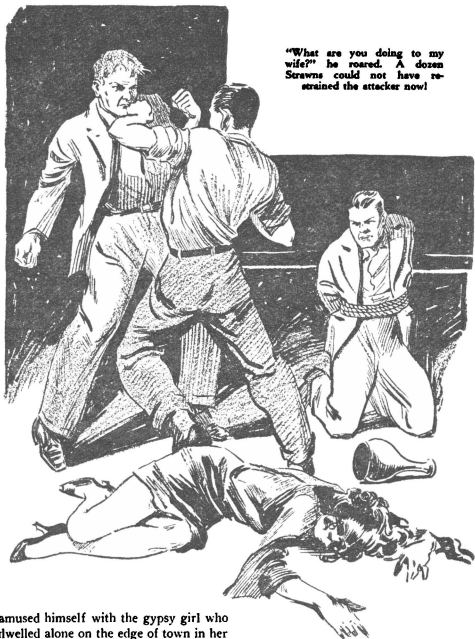
but there's something about her that—" He was gone up the pathway.

There was undoubtedly something about Nola Sanchez that attracted men, that set male blood afire. Young Hargrove's blood, at least.

She wasn't beautiful. Her nose was too proudly arched, her mouth too wide, her eyes too inscrutable. But her supple body had the lithe tawiness of a jungle beast. For three long months he had

# COFFIN

By CLINT  
MORGAN



"What are you doing to my wife?" he roared. A dozen Screws could not have restrained the attacker now!

amused himself with the gypsy girl who dwelled alone on the edge of town in her sinister cottage, even though he knew that the date of his wedding to Marge Thomas was approaching. Now the time had come to tell Nola, and Hargrove

found himself fearing her anger. He had seen her wild rages before.

Outside the door he whistled, but the door did not open as it usually did. He

tapped. No answer. He pushed it open. Nola leaned over a low table, a deck of cards spread before her. The light from the open fire danced across her hair, lighted the low V of her loose white blouse. The deep cleft between her brown breasts was dark and alluring.

"Evening, darling," trying to be jocular. But there was something about the cottage particularly depressing tonight. The click of the cards on the table sent thrills up and down his spine. The bleak coldness of the stare she turned on him chilled his blood.

She spat, "Liar! Traitor! Cheat!" Hargrove found himself recoiling before the venom in her voice as she leaped to her feet and continued the tirade. "So," she sneered, "I am a plaything, a toy to be cast aside when you are ready to marry the pasty-faced fool on top of the hill!"

She swirled with the suddenness of a tiger, her short, full skirt whirling high about the gleaming sleekness of honey-skinned thighs. Breasts trembled beneath the thin material of her blouse as she stamped her foot in anger before him. Curved fingers, hooked like talons, were before his eyes, and for the life of him he could not draw back. The black menace of her stare, the red sneer of her lips, held him fascinated.

"I didn't mean to lead you on," he stammered. "I'll pay you, Nola, whatever you ask. I mean to be fair about the thing!"

"Pay me, be fair to me! You! How can you pay me for nights when we walked together . . . and dreamed to the moon . . . and smelled the sweet grasses . . . and—oh! You say *pay me!* Give me back my kisses, give me back my love! No! You cannot pay me, Jim Hargrove, but the cards say I shall

be paid and the woman you love now will be the price." Suddenly she broke into a tempest of tears.

"Damn her," she screamed, "what has she that I haven't? What can she give you that I can't?" Wild fingers tore at the white bodice of her dress, ripped it from her brown shoulders. Her breasts swayed and quivered, rose and fell tumultuously as the torn dress dripped from her flaring hips. The dancing fire sent flickering shadows across the perfection of her body, marked sleek contours with loving fingers of flame. Her eyes were wide with a frenzy of madness, her red mouth tremulous.

Nola Sanchez could do things to men. How it happened, he never knew, but Hargrove swept her to him feverishly. Her arms were round his neck, her breasts flattened, the whole warm length of her undulant form touching his. Her lips parted to receive his kiss, her mouth an avid, writhing flame . . .

THE sound of an auto horn brought him back to his senses, cursing himself for a fool. He had come to tell this woman goodbye and now this had happened! The fire had died away but the tawny suppleness of the gypsy girl's body was illuminated by faint moonlight streaming through the window.

Quite calmly she said, "You are going to her now?"

Stiffly he answered, "Yes, I've been a fool."

Where the knife came from he never knew, but he saw its flashing arc in the moonlight and leaped in the nick of time. It split a coat sleeve, cut a small scratch on his arm. Angered, he lashed out with a fist, felt it hit soft flesh, saw her fall on the moonlit patch of floor in a bevy of trembling curves. A trickle of blood came from the corner of her mouth. An-

grily, blindly, he turned for the door. Her voice followed him, clear as a bell.

*"Whether I live or whether I die, Jim Hargrove, I will have you. Not only you, but the body of the woman you love!"*

As he stumbled down the pathway toward the car, the words seemed to follow him.

Joe Carson said, "I hated to blow but we're late for dinner. What happened?"

Hargrove couldn't answer. He simply whirled the car and turned toward his own home where his fiancée awaited. He managed to get into the house, to change his clothes without seeing Marge. He knew Doctor Strawn, who lived across the street, was entertaining her in the library.

**A**ND at the same time he changed his clothes, Dr. Strawn was trying his best to persuade Marge Wilson to change her mind about marrying Jim Hargrove. Angrily she jerked a shoulder strap over a white shoulder from which his clumsy caress had displaced it. With red cheeks she faced the little man whose breathing was still hoarse with emotion.

"All right," she raged, "he drinks, he runs after other women, he's a waster. So what? I love him and that's all that's necessary!"

Strawn held his anger. "I promise you," he said stiffly, grimly, "that he will never have you. You've teased me and tantalized me for years. You are rightfully mine."

Joe Carson, young Hargrove's friend was an unwilling eavesdropper to these words.

**B**UT Doctor Strawn was wrong. Two weeks later Hargrove married Marge Wilson. If Hargrove acted a

little strangely during the ceremony it was because a messenger had just delivered an innocent looking telegram, which, on opening, sent premonitions of dangers through him. It read:

*"Whether I live or whether I die, I will have you. Not only you, but the body of the woman you love."*

And when they left the church a pair of bleak, black eyes was in the crowd that watched, a pair of taunting red lips were twisted in a sneer.

The first night of their marriage was spent in the huge mansion Jim had inherited from his father. When he entered their room, Marge had donned a white, semi-sheer nightgown whose caressing folds hung delectably to the dainty, firm breasts and the soft, slender hips. She smiled half shyly, and touched his cheek with warm fingers. Happy in this moment, Jim marveled that all this loveliness was his. He leaned to kiss her lips, paused halfway with her white arm creeping about his neck.

From below, floating through the open window like the notes of a bird, came a shrill whistle. The whistle he and Nola had always used as a signal.

He sprang quickly away, hair prickling at the nape of his neck, strange fear beating in his veins. Was she to haunt him and taunt him forever? From the window he could see nothing. None of the servants spent the night in the house. He listened at the hall door, thought he heard a voice below. Torch in hand, he descended the steps in spite of Marge's protests. Footsteps seemed to precede him, seemed to follow him. He heard the mocking taunt of laughter, but search as he might he could find no trace of his nocturnal visitor. He gulped an enormous drink in the library, started upstairs.

A scream. He made the stairs three at a time. Marge was huddled in the corner of the bed, the bedclothes pulled around her. She was moaning in terror, breasts heaving, eyes wide with fright. "She was here! That woman! The gypsy!"

Jim's eyes had already found the note attached to his pillow by a thin knife. He knew without reading it what it said. "*Whether I live or whether I die, I will have you. You and the body of the woman you love.*"

The police? And be the laughing stock of the town? Because a jealous woman invaded his privacy, a demented woman, unbalanced, driven by hate? Instead, he locked the door, put a chair against it and went to sleep with his bride pressed tightly in his arms. Once he awakened thinking he heard footsteps in the hallway. Again the knob of the locked door creaked. And again he heard the eerie whistle coming from out in the moonlight.

HE HIRED a night watchman to watch the place, persuaded one of the servants to spend the night in. Neither these two or Marge ever heard the noises again. But Jim Hargrove did. Over and over in the silent fastnesses of the night he heard the whistle, heard the echo of a wild and passionate song. Even when he kissed his wife, inevitably at the first caress he heard the shrill bird note; and when, frightened, he drew away, taunting laughter seemed to fill the stifling summer air.

He grew thin, he drank too much. In desperation he went to Dr. Strawn, and was given a sleeping potion. Nevertheless his jangled nerves raged far into each night. He was constantly on edge. Always in the back of his brain as he

gazed down at the woman he loved he heard the gypsy curse. So Joe Carson, good Joe Carson, was sent to see Nola.

Jim met him in the library on his return. Joe shook his head, whispered, "She says if you'll see her once more she'll never bother you alive again."

THAT night Hargrove left the house in the dark of night, walked to Nola's little cottage. At first he thought she wasn't there, but her exotic scent filled the room. The air was redolent with her presence. He sat down in a chair to wait, found a bottle of wine on the table and drank deeply. And suddenly she was there beside him, her fingers in his hair, her eyes glowing and her red mouth parted.

"Nola," was all he could say. Then her arms about his neck, her mouth on his, her breasts pulsing madly against his chest. He tried to think of Marge, tried to think of home, but the woman was in his blood, was part of his heart-beat. Her fingers flitted to the white blouse. It slid from bronze shoulders, slopes of bare and honey-hued skin and again the moonlight bathed her with caressing fingers. Groaning he reached for the wine bottle, drank long and deeply. . . .

WHEN he finally reeled to the doorway, her voice followed him, softly. "Do you remember what I told you. Jim Hargrove? *Whether I live or whether I die, I will have you. You and the body of the woman you love.* And now you dare to go back to her?"

"You promised," he panted hoarsely, "you promised Joe if I saw you once more—"

"That I would never see you alive again," she finished. "Goodby, Jim."

He reeled out into the moonlight. At

home, hating himself, he couldn't go upstairs but lay down on a davenport in the hallway. Marge found him there, awakened him.

Together they heard the taunting laughter from the front porch, heard the dull thud. Together they found the almost naked body of Nola Sanchez sprawled before the screen door, the haft of a dagger protruding from the hollow between her arrogant breasts. The bronze of her body was a welter of blood.

Dr. Strawn came on the run in answer to the frantic phone call. But he could do nothing for her. Joe Carson arrived and thought of the scandal, thought of the talk of the town. And it was in Joe Carson's car that they

*She had promised she would never see him alive again! Could she have killed herself?*



carried Nola, still faintly breathing, to her own cottage among the pines.

Joe Carson, Jim and Marge stayed outside until the doctor called them. The body of the gypsy girl was covered by a sheet from head to foot. Unable to resist, Hargrove drew the sheet partially down. The red lips smiled up at him, the black eyes gazed directly into his. But there was no tremor of life in the body. Quickly he drew the sheet back into place.

Strawn said softly, "There'll be no

trouble, no scandal. I'll write the death certificate and Bradley, the mortician, will bury her from his place. The girl had no family—no friends."

After they were gone Jim Hargrove trembled in his wife's consoling arms. She whispered, "Don't, dear. It's better this way. Now she can't bother you anymore."

**M**ORNING, after a sleepless night. Weak and shaken Hargrove wobbled to Dr. Strawn's house. Hoarsely,



eyes red from liquor and sleeplessness, he said, "I've got to see her, doctor. Will you take me to see her? All night long her footsteps padded down my hallway, her whistle shrilled beneath my window. I've got to see her once again, she's calling, calling."

Strawn loaded him into the car, drove to the opposite edge of town and took him into Bradley's gloomy, ill-smelling mortuary. The darkened rooms and hallways were sepulchral.

Bradley himself fit into the picture. He was tall and somber with a yellow skin that matched his yellow teeth. He led them below into a basement room where the atmosphere was colder. Hargrove shuddered at the slab in the middle of the room, shuddered again at the sheet-covered body in spite of the chill, perspiration dribbled off his forehead. His hand trembled as he pulled the sheet from the head of the corpse. The eyes had been closed but the mouth was still twisted in that taunting sneer. It was as if he could still hear her laughter, hear her words.

Joe Carson came that afternoon, kept him from getting too drunken. Marge tried to console him to no avail. With the coming of nightfall he grew more and more restless. Through his brain rang her words, "*Whether I live or whether I die, I will have you. You and the body of the woman you love!*"

**M**IDNIGHT. He still paced the floor of his solitary room. Long ago he had quit sleeping with his wife.

She heard his footsteps in the next room and wept for him, longed to crush him to her breast, to soothe his fears. Fully clothed, she, too, waited and listened for she knew not what. And she, too, heard the melodious whistle from outside the window, saw the dim figure

of the gypsy girl in the moonlight.

More, she saw her husband leap through his own window, run toward the girl to throw himself at her feet. She saw him kiss her inanimate hands, her arms, saw the blouse slide from her shapely shoulders. Marge lifted her hand to her mouth in horror as she saw him press the corpse to his breast. But the gypsy woman made no response, uttered no sound.

Marge heard her husband say, "Forgive me, forgive me. Now I will take you home."

Hand in hand the man and the corpse walked across the lawn in the moonlight. Marge seized a light coat, threw it about her shoulders and went after them. But she made no sound, nor did the two who walked ahead. Through side streets, through black alleys. Nearing the mortuary, Jim glanced wildly back over his shoulder. His eyes were demented, his face contorted.

"Jim," shrieked Marge. Instead of halting, the pair in the lead took to their heels. Marge plunged after them, tripped on a loose rock and fell full length. When she turned the corner, she saw Jim Hargrove and Jim alone beating on the door of the mortuary. She seized his arm.

"Leave me alone," he snarled, shaking her off. "I've got to take her in!"

A light appeared inside, Bradley himself opened the door, long face wreathed in surprise.

"I've got to see her again," muttered Hargrove. And pushed past the man. He plunged into the first room, Marge following. *There in a casket before which burned seven tapers lay the inanimate body of the girl, Nola Sanchez.* Jim Hargrove screamed and fell to the floor.



"That gypsy woman was here!" she cried. And Jim knew without reading it what that note said!

**T**HEY buried her the next day. Hargrove didn't go to the funeral. He was raving drunk and kept to his bed, shrieking the words of the gypsy's curse. But his friend, Joe Carson, went. He saw the open casket, saw the smile on the woman's face just before the lid was put on. He heard the story of the night before and frowned.

If it had been Jim alone who saw the woman walking! But Marge, too. He even talked to Dr. Strawn about it. Strawn made little comment. "Hallucinations are to be expected in Hargrove's case," he said. "But I am wor-

ried about Marge. Living with a madman is hell!"

**B**UT Marge stuck. She lived with a madman for the next three years in spite of all Dr. Strawn's frantic proposals. During the winter months and fall months Jim Hargrove was restless, had to be confined in a back room whose windows were fitted with steel nettings. During the summer months he slept peacefully as a baby through the day-time and apparently the night time, and was released from his prison room.

Marge he did not know. At times he

called her Nola, pressed her fragrant body close to his emaciated frame, but the look of madness on his face always frightened her. She could not stand his caresses. Joe Carson was the only one he could talk to and know to whom he spoke.

Gravely Joe would ask how Nola was. And Jim would always reply, "More beautiful than ever, more lovely. What would I do without her, Joe. At night she whistles beneath my window and I go to her arms, and we walk the woods together. There is no other but Nola."

Joe would shake his head sadly and talk to Dr. Strawn about the impossibility of the case. Long ago Joe had given his friend up. But to his growing horror he saw Marge, faithful Marge, begin to give the little doctor a place in her heart. Evidently she, too, was despairing of Jim's return to normalcy.

Once he caught them embracing in the library when they were not aware of his presence. After all, he told himself, Marge is still young, and she yearns for love, the same as other women. But he decided that some great effort must be made to restore his friend to normalcy.

WITH the first snow the insane man grew more and more disconsolate. "It's the winters, Joe," he told Carson, "when I can't see her so often. Oh, sometimes she comes to my grating and lets me out and we go to her cottage. There's always a fire, and it's warm and cozy with her in my arms. You think she's a dead woman, Joe, but—she isn't cold. Her flesh is warm and firm, her breasts tremble and glow. But I can't stand being away from her much longer! I'll have to go and get her. I'll bring her *here!* Why, think of her going back to that cold, cold casket in the

colder ground, sleeping there waiting, waiting for her lover's arms."

Carson's phone rang near midnight the next night. Marge's frantic voice came over the wire. "It's Jim, Joe, he's gone from his room. Some way he's pried the fastenings from the screen. You'll have to help me get him back before he injures himself or someone else."

Carson's car hit eighty on the way to Hargrove's house. One look at the window showed him the steel screen had been tampered with. Was there something to this ghostly business? Did the dead woman come to whistle beneath a demented man's window, to let him out and into her arms? He followed the tracks in the wet snow. They led, not as he expected, to the cottage of the corpse, but to the cemetery.

The air was crystalline, the stars were bright overhead. Straight through the arched gate he went, a feeling of eerie horror constantly mounting. As he approached the grave of Nola Sanchez his skin prickled, his lips were hot and dry. At first all he could make out was a fresh mound of heaped earth. Stumbling forward he saw the coatless figure of Jim Hargrove clasping a woman in his arms.

"Jim," gasped Carson. A dark figure pulled away from the demented man, fled through the shadows of the vaults and tombs. Hargrove started after her but Carson caught his arm, nearly jerked him into the yawning grave.

"She's going to stay, she's going to stay," gibbered Hargrove. "Look, Joe, I dug her up! I let her out and held her in my arms. All I have to do is get her another woman to put back in the casket. But I got her out, Joe!"

Icy perspiration stood on Joe Carson's brow. The coffin, still apparently

intact, lay near the heap of earth. He was afraid to look inside it. He was afraid it might be empty, afraid that the fleeing form was the corpse he had seen buried three years before. For Joe Carson had seen with his own eyes the voluptuous figure of the gypsy girl within that coffin at that time. Still perspiring, doubting his own sanity, he pushed the coffin into the gaping hole, heaped back the earth and started for home with Hargrove.

ALL the next day the dead gypsy's prophecy kept running through his brain. "Whether I live or whether I die, I will have you. You and the body of the woman you love." Gibberish? Had he too been having hallucinations, like Jim? Had he seen a woman's body in Jim's arms? And had the coffin been empty?

Nevertheless he determined to spend the next night at Hargrove's. Dinner was a sad affair to him, for Dr. Strawn seemed to gloat over Marge; more than ever, to gloat openly as if assured he would soon possess all her charms. Carson lay down in the guest room with a heavy heart and dropped to troubled slumber before he realized it.

It was a faint whistle that awakened him. For a long time he lay there in the darkness, his addled brain refusing to admit the whistle, to admit the faint scream coming from below. Suddenly he realized he was not at home in his own bed, that he was at Marge's. Down the steps, fully clothed, ready for action. He beat on her door. No response. He opened it, flipped the lights.

The bed was empty. And on the pillow was a single splotch of red blood! He leaped to Jim's room. It, too, was empty and the back window was raised,

the steel screen swung aside. Fear was gnawing at his heart as he leaped through into the soft snow. The tracks led toward the graveyard.

*But there was no one at the grave.* A mark in the snow showed where a body had been laid. Whose body? Suddenly off among the grotesque tombstones he heard Jim's pleading voice. "I've done it, darling, I've brought a body to take your place! Now you can come to the house with me, to be warm, to stay with me forever!"

Carson sprang around the stone. Again a dark figure broke from the arms of Hargrove, dashed madly away into the shadows. Hargrove would have followed but again Carson had him, shaking him like a terrier shakes a rat, slapping his face, striking out with a fist.

"For God's sake," he panted, "where's Marge? If you brought her here, where is she now?"

"The grave," said Jim foolishly. "I'm going to put her in the coffin, so Nola can—"

But Carson was off, tugging at his arm, following the fresh footprints in the light snow. Straight back the way they had come, Hargrove gibbering and panting with exertion. Carson gasped as he realized where those tracks led. He thumbed the bell desperately.

A voice said, "Come in, my friends, you're expected." Joe Carson rushed into the darkened hallway and the ceiling fell on his head.

THE sound of a gloating voice brought him back to consciousness. Horrified he gazed at a mad scene, found he was powerless to move. He was tied and dropped against the wall. Strawn leaned over a still white figure cower-

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# Corpseless Coffin

[Continued from page 53]

ing on the bed, a figure whose magnificent breasts rose and fell tumultuously, whose wide blue eyes showed the fear she felt of the little doctor.

Jim Hargrove crouched against the far wall, gibbering, his arms clasping the rounded knees of *Nola Sanchez*. Strawn was talking in his high-pitched voice, talking to the half dressed woman on the bed.

"I told you he'd never have you, my dear, not for long at least! I've watched you and wanted you long enough. It was my plan! I drove him mad, I kept him mad! Nola was willing to help me through hate of you and love for him. Mine was the other way about, I loved you and hated the fool. So we faked the suicide. I paid Bradley to help us. He buried a death mask, painted to resemble Nola and she's been at my house ever since, driving him madder and madder, saving you—for me. And now I mean to have you. I've waited long enough for your beauty—"

"Let her alone," screamed Carson and tried to lunge to his feet. Strawn stepped quickly to him, kicked him down again and slapped his own thin chest.

"I am master here," he gloated. "You have seen too much, you know too much. Perhaps it will be the smart Mr. Carson that goes in the empty coffin at the grave. And you—" he turned to Hargrove—"I've hated you ever since you married her!" He aimed a kick at the demented man's head.

Instantly Nola was a flaming fury, a tigress. "Let him be," she screamed, and leaped at Strawn. Her fingernails bit into his face but his fist crashed against her jaw and she went down to

lie quivering on the floor in unconsciousness.

Strawn turned again to Marge. He leaned over her despite her moans, pressed her lips, clasped her soft form to his own body. Saliva drooled from his lips, madness was in his eyes. "I've waited too long for your love . . ." he moaned.

Joe Carson groaned. Then Hargrove crept like a dog from the wall, leaned over the body of Nola and leaped on the doctor, beating with his fists, shrieking curses at the top of his voice. Strawn seized a water carafe, brought it down with terrific force on his head. Hargrove staggered back against the wall, crouched there for a moment blinking the blood away from his eyes.

"What—who—?" he gasped and shook his head like a mastiff. "Damn you," he roared, "what are you doing to my wife?" A surge of gladness leaped up in Joe Carson's breast. A dozen Strawns could not have restrained the attacker now.

**F**IVE minutes later a sane Jim Hargrove held his sobbing wife in his arms. Over and over she was explaining to the unbelieving man that he had been mad for three years, that the blow on the head had restored his reason. She told about the plot, how Strawn had fed him harmful drugs instead of medicine, how Nola had given him doped wine.

When Joe Carson returned he found them clasped in each other's arms. "Thank God," he breathed. And to the reunited lovers, "The police will be here any time. They're picking up Bradley on the way over."