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"Back in the wheel-chair again," said Dall bitterly.

Dead Legs

By Edmond Hamilton

DALL was the calmer of the two who were waiting in the room. He sat in his wheel-chair with eyes impenetrable and face mask-like, his hands motionless on the blanket that covered his lower limbs. Carson, the other man, was patently nervous, glancing quickly toward the room's side door at the slightest sound.

The room in which Dall and Carson waited was a curious one. It had two doors, one at the side and one at the rear, and there were no windows. It was cement-floored, lit by concealed electric lights, and held only a few chairs, a desk and a squat steel safe. There came only the faintest murmur of street noises into it; and sounds from above indicated that the room was in the basement of the

house. Both men sat in silence.

Dall might have been a sphinx of flesh placed in the wheel-chair, so motionless was his attitude, but Carson's nervousness was visibly increasing. He jumped as there came

finally a double knock at the side door.

Dall spoke briefly and a man entered who was

younger than either of these two, and who had quick eyes and a panther-like build.

"Well, Dead Legs, we got Roper all right!" he addressed Dall excitedly. "He was trying to get out of town. Knew damned well that since we cleaned up his mob he hadn't a—"

"Not so much talk, Quinn," Dall interrupted crisply. "You've brought Roper here?"

"He's upstairs now—Burke and

Dall, the gangster, could not know that "Dead Legs" was a prophecy of doom.

Spinetti guarding him," Quinn answered. "We had our taxi planted as you said and when he took it to the station we nabbed him right off without—"

"All right, that's enough!" Dall snapped. "Tell Burke and Spinetti to bring Roper down here."

QUINN departed, and when he returned a minute later three others were with him. Two hard-faced men were obviously the guards of the third, for their automatics were close against his back.

This third man was stalwart, with a bull-like face flushed now to deep crimson. His eyes, as he entered, fastened like twin flames of fury upon the man in the wheel-chair. His hands had been securely bound, but, nevertheless, Quinn and the other two watched him closely.

"So you got me, Dead Legs!" the prisoner said bitterly to Dall. "And you weren't even satisfied to have them put me on the spot straight but had them drag me down here to your hole for you to gloat over, eh?"

"I didn't have you brought here for gloating purposes, Roper," Dall answered evenly.

Roper seemed not to have heard. "It wasn't enough," he went on, "that you and your damned mob took my end of town and all my rackets from me, that you bought some of my men and had the rest shot—you had to get me here last of all and crow to me about it!"

"I've done no crowing yet," Dall said. "And you had your warning six months ago, Roper."

"Warning!" Roper's fury seemed to reach its climax. "A warning to give up the territory my gang had always had! A warning from a cripple, a man with dead legs, a man who's never walked!"

"And a warning that I've fulfilled to the letter!" Dall reminded him. "You know now that no one in this town can buck Dead Legs Dall."

"Then, damn it, why don't you get it over with?" demanded the raging Roper. "Why don't you give your guns the word?"

Dall smiled levelly. "Because you're not going to be killed so soon, Roper. Before you die you're going to do me a great service—the greatest in the world."

Roper's laugh was ugly. "You're dreaming, Dead Legs. I'd die in torture before I'd do anything for you, and you know it."

"But you're going to do this for me whether you want to or not," Dall said, still smiling coldly. "It's a service for which I particularly chose you, Roper."

HE leaned back in his wheel-chair, his cold blue eyes on Roper's furious face. Quinn was listening, Burke and Spinetti still standing with weapons against their prisoner. At a little distance from the rest Carson was mopping his forehead, and his eyes had a nervous, desperate look.

Dall spoke again, more slowly, to Roper. "You know me, Dead Legs Dall, as every crook and almost every other person in this town knows me. You know that I've never walked, that I was born with these dead, shriveled legs, that I've sat in a chair like this for thirty years.

"They started calling me Dead Legs when I was a kid over there in the slums. Sometimes they beat me, too, because I was helpless. I soon saw that the only way I could stand against them was to be smarter than they were, and I was that. And because I was, Dead Legs was soon running a gang of kids, and as they and I grew up we became a gang of men and of tough ones, too!"

It was as though Dall had forgotten Roper and the rest as he talked, his eyes seeming to stare back into the past for a moment.

"Dead Legs Dall. . . . Yes, as that I've worked my way up, until now

I and my mob have a mortgage on this town. I've broken up every other gang here—with yours the last, Roper. I've come to the top, fought my way up, until now I've got more money and more power than I used to dream of having.

"But what good are they to me the way I am? How can I enjoy money or power when I'm chained to a wheel-chair with these dead, useless legs of mine? They couldn't keep me from getting what I wanted, but they'll keep me now from enjoying it!"

"I'm glad you realize it, Dead Legs!" said Roper harshly. "When I pass out I'll be grinning to think how you hate those legs of yours that you'll die with!"

"But I don't intend to die with them," Dall said softly. "I've reached the top and all I need to enjoy life is legs—not dead, useless legs, but living ones, legs that I can walk and run and dance with. They're what I want and I've always found a way to get what I wanted."

He leaned toward Roper. "That's where you come in, Roper. You've got what I want, strong, healthy legs. And I'm going to take them from you for myself!"

"You're crazy!" Roper exclaimed. "You poor batty cripple, you've brooded over those dead legs of yours so long you're cuckoo on them!"

"Are you so sure?" smiled Dall. "Carson, come over here."

CARSON approached slowly, glancing nervously from one to the other, and Dall gestured to him without turning from Roper.

"Do you recognize Carson? Dr. Robert Carson, one of the three greatest surgeons in this country?"

"What's he to me?" snarled Roper.

"He's going to be very much to you, Roper," Dall assured him, mockingly, "and to me, too. He's

going to take those healthy legs of yours off you and put them on me."

"You poor fool!" Roper snarled derisively. "You're cuckoo, sure. You were born with those dead legs, and you'll die with them."

"I'll not!" Dall's voice cracked with the emphasis of a whip. "You're the fool, Roper. You think because such an operation would have been impossible yesterday it's impossible to-day! But it's not! Scientists and surgeons have been removing animal limbs and grafting new ones on for years, and now surgeons like Carson are beginning to do it with humans!"

"Carson here has been able to graft fingers, hands. He can fasten the new limbs so that bone knits to bone; can tie and connect the nerve filaments, the arteries and veins; can graft new flesh to heal over the joint so that the new limbs are as usable as natural ones!"

"Carson can do it, and Carson's going to—for I've got something on him that means death for him and disgrace for his family if I spring it. Carson's fitted up all he needs to operate with back in that room behind this, and has trained Burke and Spinetti here to act as his attendants while the operations are going on. And that's to-night!"

"Yes, to-night! Carson will take off my dead legs above the knees. Then he'll take off your healthy legs and graft them at once onto my body. Then we'll bury what's left of you, Roper, under the cement floor over there in the corner. But why don't you laugh, Roper? Why don't you laugh at the impossibility of it?"

"It is impossible!" Roper cried hoarsely, beads of perspiration on his forehead. "I know you, Dead Legs—you're trying to torture me before you send me out! But the thing's not possible!"

DALL laughed. "You think it's not, Roper? But it is. Carson has done it many times with animals,

and he can do it with humans. And then I'll be Dead Legs no longer. Think what it means, Roper; think of me able to walk and run wherever I want to, and on your legs!

"Why, it'll be rich, it'll be rare! Can't you see the humor of it, Roper? Everyone congratulating Dead Legs Dall on the marvelous cure effected, everyone seeing him run and walk and dance, and none of them ever suspecting that he's doing it all on another man's legs, a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!"

"You hell-fiend!" shrieked Roper. "By God, you wouldn't dare do it!"

"Ah, you're beginning to believe now? I see you are. But be fair, Roper. Your legs would do you no good buried over there under the floor with you. And they can do me a lot of good. Why, even walking about on Roper's legs will keep me laughing all the time! Any pair of healthy legs would have been as good, but they wouldn't have the humor there would be in wearing Roper's legs!"

Roper lunged madly at the mocking Dall, straining at the bonds that held his hands, but Burke and Spineti jerked him back.

From his chair Dall watched with eyes bright with interest, but beside him Carson was trembling violently.

"You demon!" Roper cried out. Then suddenly he broke down, and his tone became supplicating, almost craven. "Dead Legs, you're not going to do a thing like that? Not really? Why, it would be wrong, it would be devilish! I know we've fought and bumped off each other's men, but that's all in the game. But this would be different—hellish!"

"But the thing's impossible," Dall said, mockingly. "You remember that, Roper, you remember how sure of its impossibility you were just a little while ago. There's nothing to fear from a man gone cuckoo, is there? It's just poor nutty Dead Legs raving, so don't be afraid."

HE turned to Carson. "Everything ready back in the operating-room?" he asked swiftly, gesturing toward the rear door.

Carson managed to nod, still trembling. "It's all ready. But Dall, this thing—"

"Is going on, Carson!" Dall said with cold finality. "We've been over that ground." He turned back to Quinn and the two guards. "All right, boys, you can take Roper back there. Nothing to say before we start, Roper? No place you'd like to go afterward—on your legs?"

Roper raised his bound, trembling hands toward Dall as he was pulled away. "Yes, you can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You hear me? You'll walk on them to hell!"

Quinn had opened the rear door, through which could be glimpsed an operating-room with white tables and gleaming apparatus. The two guards were half carrying the struggling Roper, Carson following like a man in a nightmare and Dall coming last in his wheel-chair. And, as the little party went through the door, Roper's ghastly cry rose to a screaming imprecation of hate.

"To hell, Dall! You'll walk on them to hell!" he shrieked. He was still shrieking as the door closed after them all. . . .

DALL stood—stood—on the steps of his house with Quinn and Burke. It was night, and a few feet below them the city's ceaseless currents of people and vehicles flowed along the bright-lit street. Dall was trembling inwardly with excitement and exultation, but outwardly was looking coolly along the street.

"You're sure you don't want any of us with you?" Quinn was asking. "First time you've been out, you know."

"I'll not need you, no," Dall told them. "This is a walk I want to take

alone, Quinn, a walk I've been looking forward to for thirty years."

"Just as you say, Dead Legs," Quinn agreed. "Though it'd be no trouble to go along in case you wanted us."

"There's no need," Dall repeated. "And why call me Dead Legs now? The name hardly fits me now!"

Dall stepped down to the street, and Quinn and Burke watched from the steps as he walked casually down the street.

Each step was savored by Dall as a long-starved man might savor food. It was his dream come true, he told himself. He who had sat thirty years in a chair was walking along a street. Dall thought that some passersby looked curiously at him, and he smiled to himself. It had been weeks since word had gone forth that the useless limbs of Dead Legs Dall had been miraculously cured at last.

It was worth it all, Dall told himself as he went on. Worth the ghastly night in that white operating-room, the gleam of instruments and smell of anesthetics and realms of cool unconsciousness in which only Carson's drawn white face intruded at times. Worth the red, aching pain of the weeks that followed, the utter immobility of so long and then the first stumbling attempts at walking, inside the house. Yes, worth it many times!

DALL had no objective as he walked along. It was enough for him to be merely walking, without aim or objective. Did any of these hurrying people about him, he wondered, know the true joy and pleasure of walking? They could not. They had not spent Dead Legs Dall's thirty years in a wheel-chair.

He was walking, and walking on Roper's legs. The grim humor of that still tickled Dall's sardonic mind immensely. Roper—or all of Roper but his legs—lay deep under the re-cemented floor in the corner

of his basement-office. But Roper's legs were living still and walking still, carrying Roper's worst enemy. Dall's pride expanded. What Dead Legs Dall wanted he took! Even new legs!

The hurrying people that brushed by him and the automobiles racing in the street beside him he looked on with a new eye. He had preyed upon them and their city with his criminal organization even when he was prisoned in a wheel-chair. But now that Dead Legs Dall was dead of legs no longer, what might he not do! He could expand his organization to other cities, could expand it until—

Two women a little along the street screamed, their screams drowned in the next second by the squeal of brakes. Dall stood out in the middle of the street, and the taxi that had almost run him down when he had leaped suddenly into the street was skidding to a stop beside him. Its driver emerged red-faced with anger and bore down on Dall.

"What in hell's the matter with you, fellow?" he cried. "You saw me coming and jumped right out in front of me! Are you trying to kill yourself?"

Dall seemed dazed, bewildered, stupefied. "I didn't mean to do it!" he stammered, his eyes roving wildly now. "I didn't mean—my legs seemed just to jump out with me in spite of myself."

"That's some story, that you jumped in spite of yourself!" the driver exclaimed. "I ought to take a good sock at you for—" He stopped suddenly, recognizing the man before him. "Why, it's Dead Legs Dall!" His tone was abruptly respectful, apologetic. "I heard you'd been cured, but I didn't recognize you, Mr. Dall. Of course I didn't mean any of that stuff for you—"

"It's all right—all right," Dall said. His one desire was to get away from the fast-collecting crowd. "My fault entirely." He regained the

sidewalk and started on. The driver stared after him, then returned to his cab. The crowd dispersed, and Dall walked on along the street.

BUT Dall was walking now in a daze. His mind was in sudden turmoil. What he had told the taxi driver was the truth: he had had no intention of leaping into the street until without command of his brain his legs had suddenly carried him directly in front of the onrushing cab! It was as though his legs had wanted to kill him, Dall thought.

Dall gripped himself. This would not do, he told himself. He was wrought up, nervous, and it was but natural that he should have made a misstep when walking, when legs and walking were so new to him. It was only that, could be only that. Yet back in Dall's mind persisted the thought that it had not been a misstep but a swift deliberate leap of his legs in spite of himself.

He thrust the thought back, and, as he walked on, he became once more master of himself. Every step he took his legs obeyed him. He could feel the hard sidewalk under his feet, could place each step as he wished. Dall breathed more easily. Nerves, that was all! It was but natural: one didn't often try walking for the first time—and with another man's legs! Dall even smiled.

His first confidence had almost entirely returned. He stepped unhesitatingly along once more. At that moment Dall saw thundering along the street in his direction two heavy trucks, one trying to pass the other. Some instinct warned Dall or he felt the preparatory bunching of his legs under him. For as he grasped wildly at a lamp-post beside him, his legs shot out with him in a swift leap into the two trucks' path!

It was Dall's clutch at the lamp-post that saved him, for he managed to grasp it as his legs leaped with him and to hold to it until the trucks

had passed. The effort of his legs to leap out stopped instantly, but Dall clung desperately to the lamp-post. He knew now! Undistinguishable sounds came from him.

PASSERSBY who saw Dall clinging to the post desperately, with face deathly white and eyes terror-haunted, thought him drunk, apparently, and stared at him. Some stopped, and then a blue-uniformed policeman shouldered through them toward Dall.

"What's this—another hooch-fiend?" he demanded sharply; then he recognized Dall. Respect tinged his manner. "What's the matter, Dead Legs?" he asked.

"Get me a taxi!" croaked Dall, clinging still to the post. "I've got to get home. I've got to get home!"

Wheeler signalled a passing cab. "What's the matter, legs go back on you?" he asked. "I heard you were cured, Dall, but you must have tried walking too soon. Got to get used to it, you know."

Dall managed to nod. "That's it, I guess. I've got to get used to it."

The cab drew up and Dall grasped its door-handle, held it tightly until he was inside. There was no need, for his legs stepped up with him quite normally, making no involuntary movements.

While the cab darted back along the street Dall clung tightly to the assist-straps. He was breathing fast, and his mind swirled chaotically with horror. He did not know the cab had stopped until its door opened.

Quinn and Burke were still up on the steps, and at his motion came running down to the cab. Both looked inquiringly at Dall.

"Grab my arms and don't let me go until we're inside the house," Dall told them. At the blank expressions he snarled with sudden fury, "Do as you're told, damn you! Hold my arms till I tell you to let go!"

HELD on either side by the two he went up the steps into the house. His legs walked up with him quite naturally, obeying every command of his brain. There seemed no need of the two restraining men. Yet Dall did not tell them to release him until he was down in his basement-office with doors closed.

"Call Carson!" Dall ordered as he sank into a chair. "Tell him to come over here, and to come quick!"

While Quinn obeyed Dall sat in a chair, his mind awl with incoherent thoughts. There could be no doubt of it, he told himself, his legs had twice that night tried to bring death upon him, and chance alone had prevented it. It was his legs, and not he, that had each time sought to hurl him to death in the street! His legs? No, Roper's legs!

Dall's eyes sought the oblong of newer, whiter cement in the floor at the room's corner. Roper lay under that, he told himself. Roper could do him no harm. But Roper's legs? There came rushing to Dall's mind those last words Roper had shrieked as he had been dragged into that operating-room at the rear, his last yells of agony and hate.

"You can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

Dall's hands clenched his chair's arms until his knuckles showed white. He sought to command himself. This was all moonshine, superstitious folly into which he was working himself. Roper was dead, and how could Roper's legs retain the hate of their former owner? How could Roper's legs try to kill him?

But they *had* tried to kill him, and twice this night! The truth rose in Dall's mind and could not be smashed down by any effort of will. He was wearing the legs of Roper, of the man whose last cry had been one of hate for himself. And, though attached to him, the legs were not part of him, but part of Roper still.

Part of Roper's being and part of Roper's hate!

"You'll walk on them to hell. You'll walk on them to hell—to hell—to—"

"Carson's here," Burke announced from the door.

"Send him in here at once!" Dall ordered.

CARSON entered, his face pale and his eyes straying despite himself to the oblong of white cement in the corner. With an effort of will he turned his gaze from it. "What's the matter, Dall?" he asked.

"Everything's the matter," Dall answered. "Roper's legs are trying to kill me." At Carson's stupefied expression Dall's inner madness burst forth. "You heard me! Roper's legs are trying to kill me!"

Carson managed speech. "Now, Dall, calm down. You've been out for the first time and naturally you're wrought up."

"You fool!" said Dall bitterly. "Do you think I'm a nervous woman? I tell you I walked out to-night, and without any will of mine my legs jumped with me out in front of a taxi! Only luck saved me! Five minutes later they tried to leap with me in front of two trucks, and if I hadn't caught a post and hung onto it, it would have been all up."

"Neither time did I have the slightest intention of making such a jump, mind you! And don't tell me they were missteps, for they weren't. They were deliberate leaps on the part of my legs. Carson, you know how Roper hated me. Well, his legs retain that hate. They're trying to kill me!"

Carson had paled further as he listened, but he was still the calmer of the two.

"Dall, listen to me. You've gone through a big operation, the biggest ever heard of, and you've lain for weeks recovering from it. Then to-night you go out to take your first

walk in the street and because your new legs play queer tricks on you, you jump to the fantastic conclusion that they're still Roper's legs and trying to kill you."

"But how explain it?" Dall insisted. "How explain that my legs acted without the slightest order from my brain?"

"Dall, if you had a tenth of my medical experience you'd know that even in normal persons the control of the brain over the limbs often has queer lapses. Why, when my foot goes to sleep, or when my legs cramp when swimming, what's that but a lapse of the brain's control over the limbs? Everyone's had such experiences.

"Then what of your case, in which you've actually had new legs attached to your body, new nerves knitting to nerves, and bone to bone? It stands to reason, Dall, that in such case your legs would play even queerer tricks on you than in normal cases. Why, in walking you're using motor-nerves of your brain you never used before, so that at present your brain has an uncertain control over your legs."

"But that just proves what I've been saying," Dall exclaimed. "They're Roper's legs, and my brain can't control them all the time. Roper's last thought was hate of me, and of you, too, and his legs are still controlled by that thought!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Carson. "Dall, get up and walk slowly along the room here. I'll show you I'm right."

DALL rose and carefully stepped along the room's length, Carson watching his movements closely from the side. Dall walked like a man at the edge of a precipice, but his legs seemed to move normally enough.

As Dall stepped more confidently back along the room toward the surgeon, Carson nodded. "You see,

there's nothing the mat—" he was saying, when abruptly Dall's foot shot out and tripped Carson so that he fell to the floor! Instantly Dall's legs were lashing out in furious kicks at the fallen surgeon!

"My God, Dall!" cried Carson as he sought to rise against the shower of fierce kicks. "Get back. You're killing me!"

"I can't—the legs won't obey me!" Dall screamed, his face white and distorted. "Quinn—Burke—come here and get me!"

Quinn and Burke bursting into the room, halted in stupefaction at the sight of Dall kicking with terrific savagery at the prostrate Carson who was shielding his head with his arms and trying to regain his feet.

"Pull me away!" Dall shrieked to them. "Grab me and pull me away from him! Quick, you fools!"

Bewildered, Quinn and Burke rushed forward and grasped Dall's arms and jerked him from the fallen man. For a moment his feet still lashed out in vain kicks toward Carson and then ceased their movements.

Dall burst into a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. "Do you believe now, Carson? Roper's legs nearly got you that time! You performed the operation, you know. Roper hated you almost as much as me. Do you believe now these legs of mine are still Roper's legs?"

Carson was staggering up, his bruised face ghastly in expression. "Keep holding him," he implored Quinn and Burke thickly. "Don't let him—don't let *them* get at me! Oh, God, don't let Roper's legs get at me again!"

Dall managed to get some grip upon himself. "Burke, get Carson out to his car and take him home," he ordered his aide. "Quinn, you hold me here until they're gone and then go upstairs and get Spinetti."

Whimpering and shaking, the surgeon hastened from the room.

WHEN Burke and Carson were gone, Quinn released Dall and hastened up to the house's upper floors. Left alone, Dall paced back and forth, his head throbbing wildly. He tried to think.

It was true, then! Impossible, insane, but true! Roper's legs, attached to his body, were still Roper's legs, and had tried to kill him and to kill Carson, too! And if he went alone into the street, if he went anywhere near danger, Roper's legs would carry him into the path of death. He must not go out alone; he must keep his aides always within reach! But was this the freedom Dead Legs Dall had dreamed of in his wheel-chair?

Dall's legs seemed to obey him perfectly as he paced the room. But he knew—maddening thought!—they were but biding their time. When opportunity came they would try again to kill him. Was Roper laughing; laughing somewhere in the beyond? Was Roper still screaming the words that seemed to enter his ears: “—walk on them to hell—walk on them to hell—”

With a start Dall found that he had stopped pacing the room and was standing in a corner. He was standing on the oblong of new, white cement beneath which Roper lay! With a hoarse cry Dall jumped back, clutching a chair. His legs had taken him, without his knowing it, to the tomb of the man of whom his legs had been part!

Was Roper laughing at him this moment? Was he? Dall set his teeth as Quinn returned with Spinetti. He was a fighter; he would fight this!

Quinn and Spinetti approached him with some awe. “My God, Dead Legs,” Quinn was saying, “you were shouting there that these new legs of yours were still Roper's!”

Dall's cold eyes swept him. “What if they are?” he demanded bitingly. “My legs may be Roper's, but the rest of me is still Dall, and it's

Dall's orders you obey, isn't it?”

Spinetti crossed himself furtively, his eyes fearful upon Dall, and Quinn's lean face was a shade paler. “I'm not bucking your orders, but this business kind of scares me,” he declared. “When Roper's legs were put on you it was—”

“That's enough from you, Quinn!” snapped Dall. “You and Spinetti take my arms and help me up to bed—and keep a tight hold on me going up the stairs.”

IT took several minutes for them to reach Dall's bedroom on the upper floor, Quinn and Spinetti gripping his arms tightly, though his legs made no untoward movements on the way. At Dall's command they stayed until he was in bed.

“Now I want you two to take turns sitting beside the bed here until morning,” he told them. “If you see me make a move to get out of bed, grab me and hold me, do you hear?”

“Sure, we get it, Dead Legs,” Quinn answered. At the name Dall's rage flamed. “And don't call me Dead Legs any more!” he shouted.

Yet, as he sank back, Quinn taking the chair for the first watch, the name rang still in Dall's ears. Dead Legs! The name that had been familiar to him since childhood, but that had now a secret significance. Dead legs, yes, but not now the shrunken limbs that had won him the name. Dead Legs because now he wore a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!

Roper's face seemed passing before him in the darkness, a grin of triumph upon it. Other faces passed, too, Carson's drawn one and Quinn's, but always foremost was Roper's. He could not see whether the body below the face had legs, but Roper's face was clear—Roper's face—

Dall crashed to wakefulness to find himself struggling with Spinetti beside his bedroom window. Quinn was running in to answer Spinetti's shouts, and the two were holding

him back from the window now. Then as Dall came to full wakefulness his struggles ceased.

"Sure would have thrown yourself right out this window if I hadn't been watching!" Spinetti exclaimed. "You sprang out and were almost to the window before I knew it!"

DALL managed to speak after a while. "Take me back over to bed," he told them, choking slightly. "Then you go down, Quinn, and call up Carson and tell him to come back here the first thing in the morning. You stay and watch me, Spinetti. I won't be sleeping again."

Despite Quinn's call it was not early morning but almost noon of the next day when Carson arrived. The surgeon's face was still deathly pale despite its bruises as he came into Dall's basement-office. This time as he entered with Quinn he did not glance hastily at the white rectangle in the cement floor of the corner, but gazed at it with a fixed, fascinated stare.

Dall watched him from his chair, his eyes red from sleeplessness, like Carson's, and his face pale, but set. He smiled grimly as Carson, when he caught sight of Dall, shrank instinctively back with sudden terror in his eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Carson," Dall said. "I had Quinn tie me in this chair before you came, and he'll not release me until you go."

"I'm not afraid," Carson said hoarsely. "I think I'm past fear by this morning, Dall."

"Take hold of yourself, man!" Dall commanded him. "We're in a jam, but I'm in it worse than you, and I'm not whining yet."

Carson smiled strangely. "You call it a jam! Dall, we've done a black thing, a thing of evil. We've sinned! Don't try to pass it off as you're trying. I tell you we've done a thing of horror, and we're starting to pay for it! You're paying most, but even

though you forced me to do my share of the thing I'm paying, too!

"Dall, I've been thinking, I've been remembering those last words Roper shouted to you. 'You'll walk on my legs to hell!' I see that you remember them. You've been thinking of them, too. Well, that's what you're doing. You've got Roper's legs on you, and, somehow, God only knows, they're doing what Roper wanted to do—they are taking you and trying to take me to death!"

"Carson, I told you to take hold of yourself. What we've got to do is to find some way of stopping this thing. You put Roper's legs on me. You've got to find some way of stopping these attempts of theirs to kill me!"

CARSON stared haggardly. "Some way of stopping it? Dall, there is one way in which this can be stopped, and only one way."

"And what's that way?" Dall demanded.

Carson leaned tensely toward him. "That way is to take Roper's legs off you again!"

Dall exploded into fury. "Like hell! Do you think, Carson, I went through those weeks of aching pain to give up now? Do you think I'll surrender the legs I worked for and planned for and dreamed of having?"

"Dall, give them up," Carson urged. "It's the only way of saving you, of saving us both! I tell you, this thing has brought me almost to insanity. Roper's legs on your body, trying to kill you, trying to kill me—give them up. You'll be no worse off than before."

"I'll not do it!" gritted Dall. "What if they are Roper's legs and trying to kill me? I was never afraid of Roper himself, and I'm not afraid of his legs now even though they're on my body!"

Carson rose, his face a deathlier white than before and with a desperate resolve in his eyes.

"Dall, think! I'm the only surgeon living who will take them off for you! Any other would refuse and think you insane if you asked him to do it. And if you told your story they'd simply have you arrested and tried for murder. I'm the only one who can release you, the only one who can free you from these legs of Roper's that are trying to kill you.

"You're not fighting just Roper's legs, but Roper himself, man. Roper who, somehow, from somewhere out there, is trying to kill you with these legs of his you're wearing!"

"And I'll fight him!" cried Dall. "I took his legs and I'll keep them despite Roper and all the fiends of hell!"

"That's your last word?" Carson asked, his face strange, his eyes turning fixedly again toward the white oblong in the corner, and then back to Dall.

"My last word, yes. Dead Legs Dall keeps what he's got and has always done so!"

CARSON went out without another word, walking stiffly and strangely. Quinn and Burke entered in answer to Dall's call, a hint of horror in their eyes as they met his.

"Spinetti's gone!" Quinn announced. "Must have beat it just now. He was crazy afraid and babbling about devil's work this morning, and when I looked in his room now he and his things were gone."

"Damn him!" Dall exclaimed. "I'll show him he can't back on me, devil's work or not. I'll have him back here in two days!"

"Want me to go out and get the boys started after him?" Burke asked. Dall looked levelly at him and laughed harshly.

"You'd like to get out, too, wouldn't you, Burke? And you, too, Quinn? Well, you're going to stay. No matter what devil's work there is, no matter if I came out of hell itself, I'm Dead Legs Dall and nobody

in this town forgets it. Come over here and untie me!"

When Quinn and Burke had released him from the chair Dall stood up and walked back and forth. His limbs seemed to obey every command of his brain. Then suddenly like a flash they hurtled with him across the room to fling him with force against the wall!

Dall's outflung hands alone saved his head from crashing against the wall, but, as it was, he was jarred and bruised by the shock when Quinn and Burke reached his side and helped him up. He looked about him, half-stunned.

"Keep holding me!" he gasped to them. "They'll get me even in here if they can!"

"We can tie them together and put you in your old wheel-chair," Quinn suggested. "That'll keep them from jumping around like that, and you'll still be able to move about."

"Go ahead, then," Dall ordered, his face ghastly. While Burke went for the wheel-chair Quinn fastened his legs together.

When they had lifted him into the chair Dall lay back, breathing hard. The horror upon the faces of his two aides was now undisguised.

"Right back in the wheel-chair again," said Dall bitterly. "All I need is the blanket over my legs once more."

He shouted with sudden madness. "Are you laughing at me now, Roper, wherever you are? Damn you, are you laughing?"

"For God's sake don't talk that way, Dead Legs," Burke said. "My nerve's going as it is."

DALL lay back, the other two withdrawing a little from him. A succession of heavy notes of sound seemed beating in Dall's ears, methodical, steady. They changed from mere sounds into words, spoken words: "You'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

The words seemed to be crashing upon Dall from all sides by thunderous voices, yet somehow above all those voices came the screaming curse of Roper. Then Dall put his hands over his ears, but he could still hear the words pounding into his brain. And as he turned his head he could see the white rectangle in the floor at the corner, under which lay Roper—Roper—

The hoarse exclamations of Burke and Quinn pierced his mind and he woke to the realization that a convulsive movement of his bound legs had almost thrown him out of the wheel-chair! He gripped the chair's arms just in time, holding on while his legs threshed wildly about. Quinn and Burke clutched the straining legs, held them, and in a moment they quieted.

For an hour following that Dall's legs were still, and then again they were kicking in wild efforts to throw him from the chair. Again Dall clung to the chair and fought them, with the other two aiding him. But when, in the half hour after that, the legs made two more attempts to hurl him out of the wheel-chair, Dall felt his mind breaking and giving beneath the horror.

He fought the threshing and struggling of his legs, clinging wildly to the wheel-chair from which they sought to throw him. It was only in an interval of this terrible struggle that he became aware that he was alone in the room, that Burke and Quinn had yielded to their terror and fled. In his struggle with his legs he had not heard the closing of the door.

"Damn you, come back!" he cried. "Quinn—you and Burke—I'll have you all bumped. I'm still Dead Legs Dall." There came no answer.

No answer but the silence of the white oblong in the floor at the room's corner. Dall shouted to it. "You've not got me yet, Roper! Your legs haven't got me yet! I can still

beat you. I can have Carson take them off."

HE wheeled himself to the desk, and, grasping the telephone, called a number. He shouted hoarsely to the man who answered, "Tell Carson that Dall wants him. Tell him Dall wants him over here at once!"

The voice that answered him was that of a well-trained servant, but it sounded strange. "But Dr. Carson can't come, sir. He's—"

"Tell Carson he's got to come!" Dall screamed into the instrument. "He's got to take Roper's legs off me, do you hear? Roper's here under the floor, but his legs are on me and he's got to take them off—take them off—"

"But Dr. Carson killed himself an hour ago, sir," the other said. "The police are here now. I'll tell them you want Dr. Carson if you—"

But Dall had hung up the receiver, was staring into blankness. Carson dead, Carson a suicide! He remembered Carson's white, strange face when the surgeon had left him. Carson was dead, the one man who could have taken Roper's legs from him! And even now those legs were again struggling, straining!

But there was a way out, even so! Dall wheeled his chair away from the desk, out into the room. Yes, a way out of the madness rapidly overtaking his brain! With legs still threshing and twisting he wheeled his chair toward the door of the operating room at the rear. He turned there to shake a trembling hand at the white-cement oblong in the floor back in the office's corner.

"You've not got me even yet, Roper, you hear? I'll beat you even now—even now." There was a hint of determination in Dall's wild mutterings. . . .

THE policemen and reporters in the little crowd were talking in excited voices as they came down

into the basement corridor of Dall's house and paused outside the door of his office. Their voices could be heard in snatches of sentences as they interrupted each other.

"—heard that Dead Legs had something on Dr. Carson for a long time, but never thought—"

"—butler said he screamed about Roper being buried under the floor in here and something about Roper's legs. We knew damned well Dall was the one who put Roper away, but couldn't pin—"

The police-captain in charge turned at the door. "Have your guns ready, there. We're going right in."

The door flew open from his kick and with pistols ready the policemen burst into Dall's office. A glance showed that he was not in it, but the door at its rear was open and in a moment they were through that. All stared about them for a moment at the elaborately-fitted little operating-room. Then they uttered cries of horror as they saw the wheel-chair that stood beside an instrument-cabinet.

Dall sat in that wheel-chair, his

eyes staring blankly out of his dead, distorted face. His hands still held tightly a heavy, ax-like surgical implement, and his legs had been cut off by terrific strokes above the knees. In the red pool around the chair lay the severed bonds that had held his legs, but the legs themselves were not near the chair nor anywhere in the operating-room. The men gazed at one another dumbly.

Then someone pointed dumbly, and all saw that red footprints led from the chair into the room they had first rushed through, the office. They followed the footprints back in there and from them came exclamations of an utter and deeper horror as they saw. On the oblong of whiter cement at the corner of the room's floor lay the two severed legs.

"Roper was buried under the floor there, he said," someone exclaimed in a choking voice. "And he said Roper's legs—"

But another cried what was in all their minds. "Roper's legs or not, Dall did it back there in the other room. He never moved afterward. . . .

"How did the legs get here?"