

# STARTLING 15¢ MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

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## TWO FULL LENGTH NOVELS OF EERIE MENACE

**FLESH FOR THE DEVIL'S PIPER.....Wayne Rogers 6**

The girls who heard the love-call sent from the depths of Dead Man's pond were filled with a raging madness that made them plunge eagerly into the dark waters for a rendezvous with death!

**BUS LINE FOR THE DEAD.....Otis Cameron 62**

The horror of that journey with the cadavers had only just begun for Nell Mansfield when the death bus stopped. For it brought her to a picnic where rotting corpses from the grave danced around the fires that would roast her flesh!

## TWO BLOOD-CHILLING NOVELETTES

**DEATH STOCKS HIS HAREM.....Francis James 38**

Hell had spawned upon the city street a brood of hideously deformed monsters who made the night clamor with the groans of murdered men and the agonized screams of lovely women!

**THE POOL OF AGONY.....Conrad Kimball 66**

How could I watch that inhuman diving contest and not go mad? The pool into which those monsters were about to throw my beloved fiancée was filled with boiling oil!

## THREE SHORT STORIES OF STARK TERROR

**MY HANDS WANT BLOOD.....Richard Huzarski 28**

The madness in Red Cramer's blood changed his love into a saturnalia of murder where his gentle caresses mingled with the tortures of a fiend!

**THE DINNER COOKED IN HELL.....Mindret Lord 56**

The meal was baked in the ovens of hell; the entertainment was planned in the antechamber of Satan!

**I AM THE DEMON.....William B. Rainey 79**

My mind was twisted by lust for speed, but I knew that a living death awaited me if I didn't drive in tomorrow's race; knew that if I did, my wife and child would perish!

— AND —

**DEATH'S HAND-MAIDEN.....The Editors 4**

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# Death's Hand-Maiden

**T**HERE are some stories too ghastly to be written—to horrible ever to be printed, yet so great is the fascination of stark, blood-chilling terror, that those who have known it must speak of it, and those who have not, must listen.

Nothing was further from our minds than fear as we sat across a chess-board till the early morning hours, leisurely conversing with our friend. Nothing was further from our minds . . . yet in a moment fear entered the room.

Our host's son burst through the door—a young, blond giant of more than six feet, healthy as a wild cat. Yet at that moment, his face was the color of death. He stood staring vacantly at us for a long moment, then moved toward his room. The darkness of the hallway seemed to terrify him. He stopped, turned back. His fingers were shaking so much that the decanter clicked like castenets against the glass, and a small puddle formed on the table as he poured himself a stiff four fingers of Scotch. He drained it at a gulp, and gradually the color returned to his face. Up to this point none of us had spoken. With his entrance into the room, the hand of fear had paralyzed our tongues.

The kid's father recovered first. "What's the matter, son? What in God's Name has happened?"

The boy, whom we will call Bill, refused to talk to his father. He said that first he had to tell me. I followed him as he lead the way to his room, and noticed that even now he flinched as he walked into the darkness.

A not unpleasant thrill of anticipation ran through me as I wondered what grisly scene of horror would be laid bare before me; what tale of cold menace would terrify me. I listened, and from that moment I knew that the terror of that story would never completely leave me until I recounted at least a part of it to others.

"Something prompted me to stop at the Midnight Rendezvous after I drove Eleanor home," began Bill. "I don't know what it was—I certainly didn't care for a drink—but something made me stop and go in. I ordered a beer and then glanced through the dance floor to see who the prettiest girl there was—you know how it is. It didn't take long to find her.

"She was like a panther—lithe, sensuous, slinky. Her nails were blood-red and long; her hair was an indefinable tawny color like her dress. Her eyes were yellow.

"She was one of those fascinating creatures that instantly challenge a man—I knew immediately that I had to dance with her. I did. And then I drove her home. I didn't notice the house except that it was old and dark, and some place I couldn't find again even if I wanted to.

"We smoked a cigarette together in the parlor, then we turned the radio on and danced. Presently she broke away and went upstairs, telling me to follow in five minutes and telling me exactly which door to enter.

"There was something strange about the way she said it, but I wouldn't have attached any importance to it when I climbed up the steps, if I hadn't heard footsteps and strangely muffled sounds coming from beneath the adjoining door.

"I don't know what possessed me to open it, but my God, if I hadn't—I! There was a creature standing by the bed; he wasn't anything human. He was four feet high, almost as wide, and horribly twisted. His head was the size of a bushel-basket. . . .

"But the thing on the bed! That had been a man . . . once. Now. . . . The creature screamed when it saw me, raised the huge butcher knife that was grasped in its hand, and lunged forward. That—that girl had been luring men there—God knows why—for that thing to destroy!

"I kicked the door shut against its face and threw myself down the stairs. . . . I don't remember driving the car home!"

As I went downstairs and out into the night, I shuddered. There had been nothing I could do for that kid. I left him sobbing, perhaps scarred for life by a hideous experience which had grown out of such a harmless thing as dancing to soft music . . . with a pretty girl! . . . Sometimes, the most commonplace situations lead to the most harrowing nightmares. . . .