

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 30, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor. Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for July, 1925

- Cover Design Andrew Brosnatch
- The Werewolf of Ponkert.....H. Warner Munn 11
They Flayed Him Alive and Wrote His Story on His Tanned Skin
- The Death Cure.....Paul S. Powers 31
He Restored Life to the Body, But Could Not Bring Back the Soul
- Farthingale's PoppyEli Colter 37
Four Men Make a Tremendous Effort to Revive the Dead
- The Sudden Death of Luke A. Lucas...Harold E. Somerville 47
The Rumor of Luke's Demise Spread Like a Prairie Fire
- The White Queen of the Corolans.....Arthur Thatcher 49
Two-Part Serial of Strange Adventures in Africa—Part One

(Continued on Next Page)

FARTHINGALE'S POPPY

by Eli Colter



WELL, then, the whole question is—could Gordon come back? If the dead return, in any fashion, we can get a solution to the ghastly enigma."

Lawrence, puffing absent-mindedly at his vile pipe, leaned back in his chair and watched his host's face with covert eyes.

"Gentlemen, the case is closed. Ascertain whether or not the dead can come back. Simplest matter on earth." Bob Wasson, a cynical smile on his good-humored mouth, bowed in elaborate mockery to the three men gathered in his rooms. "I should suggest that we leave it to Professor Lawrence, here. He's the original Gullible Guy, spook chaser and solver of psychic problems. Can the dead come back, Larry?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. I should like to find out," Lawrence answered mildly, unruffled by Wasson's sarcasm. "If there is any way of reaching Frank Gordon, I shall certainly discover it before I give up, your inane contention to the contrary notwithstanding! I've gone rather far already. I'm certain Frank knows I'm trying to reach him. Certain he's trying to reach me, too. What's the matter with you fellows? Haven't you any respect for Frank's mem-

ory?" The rebuke wiped Wasson's cynical smile out of existence.

"I wouldn't say that, Larry, if I were you. We've as much respect and affection for Frank's memory as you have. It's simply that—to us—your continual harping on this spiritualistic stuff seems somewhat ridiculous."

"Why ridiculous?" Lawrence interrupted defensively.

"Oh, it's so futile," Wasson answered soberly. "There's been such a lot of bunk talked about conversing with the dead, so much fakery going on among mediums, such a lot of windy blah over nothing at all and getting no results. One finally comes to the point where anything remotely approaching psychic phenomena is considered empty hokum. Why, man alive!" Wasson's eyes lit with excitement at the very thought. "You ought to know that if there were any possible basis for belief in this business of reaching the dead, we three would be the first to back you up in trying to establish communication with Frank Gordon. But it simply can't be done, and it looks rather silly to see a man of your intelligence placing credence in obvious chimeras." The flash of excitement died out of Wasson's eyes, and he leaned

against the wall with a shrug as he finished speaking.

"And it looks rather silly to see a man of your intelligence vigorously refuting everything he cannot instantly understand. And it's worse than silly to deride anyone who has a belief incompatible with your own," Lawrence retorted warmly. "It's poor taste. I don't expect to find Gordoon stalking along some dismal lane, clad in a sheet and clanking a chain, you know. I expect to find the same old lovable nut we used to know—see him, and hear him too, maybe. You poor blockheads don't want to bet so high on the cards in sight. I have an ace in the hole. Gordoon loved—poppies."

"Well, for cat's sake, what has that to do with the price of shoes?" Jim Farthingale pursed his mouth, with meticulous precision, blowing a ring of smoke, but he shot Lawrence a glance, and there was a peculiar expression on his face. Lawrence turned his head, and his eyes narrowed slightly as he included all three of the others in his reply:

"Gentlemen," he said softly, "*Farthingale has a poppy.*"

Farthingale started.

FRANK GORDOON had been chum and comrade to them all. But he had lived closest to the understanding and affection of Jim Farthingale. The two had been students together at the same medical school. Both of them had risen to well deserved heights in their profession. Then, in the full flush of his career, Frank Gordoon had died. Very strangely had Frank Gordoon died!

He had been found on his own wide lawn, under a balsam poplar tree. The servants had discovered him early in the morning, stretched at full length, easily, as if he had lain down and passed away in a comfortable sleep. Organically he had been sound. No marks of any kind were on the

body. No trace of poison in the stomach or blood. The mystery of his death had caused no little consternation in the old circle which had been composed of himself, Farthingale, Wasson, who was a portrait painter; Lawrence, the architect; and Arturo Benito, a tenor in a noted grand opera company.

Benito was mostly an absentee member of the group, since the greater portion of his time was spent, necessarily, in the East where the opera held forth during season. Just now he was on a two months' vacation and had come directly to the city where the circle had its existence. Naturally, the talk had turned upon the strange death of Frank Gordoon. Every conceivable idea admitting of a cause for mortality had been raised, followed to a logical conclusion and discarded. Wasson had remarked that he would give anything he possessed to know just how Gordoon had gone out, but of course that was a thing known only to Frank. It was then Lawrence had countered with the remark that all they had to do was reach Gordoon, and they might "get an answer to the ghastly enigma."

During all this discussion Benito had been silent. But at Lawrence's later mention of the poppy owned by Farthingale, and at the doctor's resultant start, the singer sat up in his chair and looked intently at Farthingale.

"See here, Farthy. When did you say he died?"

"Sometime in the early morning, the night of the tenth, exactly two months ago yesterday." Farthingale glanced at the singer interrogatively. "Why?"

"Most queer." Benito frowned, and a look of puzzlement came into his eyes. "Just two months ago tonight we were singing *Monna Vanna*. There isn't much opportunity for the tenor in that score, but I was in good voice and made the most of it. In the last

act, as I stood in my bonds, someone in the gallery began cheering. Another took it up, and another, and presently the whole house was shouting 'bravo.' Very unusual. Then, I can't say why, I was impelled to look down. There at my feet lay a poppy. Just a single, bright red poppy. Afterward I found that no one had seen it thrown there. No one knew from whence it had come. Oddly enough, I instantly thought of Gordoan and his fondness for that particular flower. Now, what do you make of that?"

"A good deal," Lawrence said quickly. "Gordoan himself, of course."

"Nonsense!" Benito's objection was involuntary. "But it was singular. I think—"

"Well I think we'll all be getting the jim-jams if we don't change the subject," Wasson cut in smoothly. "I move we all go down to the grill and massacre some food. Is it unanimous?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" Farthingale rose with alacrity, quite evidently relieved at the termination of the conversation with Gordoan.

THE four men got into their wraps and passed down the stairs, and as they came out into the street Lawrence drew Benito back, allowing the other two men to get a few paces ahead. Benito peered at the architect through the shadows of the trees caused by the street lamps, and Lawrence answered his questioning look in an undertone.

"I wanted to ask you about that poppy, Arturo. Didn't you say you were in bonds? I've never seen *Monna Vanna*. What kind of bonds?"

"Why, my hands were tied together, behind my back."

"Helpless—hands tied behind your back. Hands tied—Gad! That's it! I'm right!" Lawrence's low exclamation was so vehement that Benito looked at him in astonishment.

"Whatever are you saying, Larry? Right—what are you right about?"

"Frank, of course! That's what he was trying to tell you. *He's* helpless, too. *His* hands are tied."

"For heaven's sake, what are you trying to get at?" Benito stared through the night's shadows, startled by the significance back of the architect's assertion.

"We'll get to it later," Lawrence evaded. "I'm going to turn over that ace in the hole the first chance I can grab. What I want to see now is that poppy of Farthingale's. Old doc and Bob Wasson are two of the rankest materialists I know. Farthy's the worse of the two. He says all doctors are materialists. He and Wasson refuse to take seriously any of my attempts to reach Gordoan. There was something mighty queer about the way he died. I mean to find out what it was. And since he's the only one who knows—what's the logical thing to do? I want to ask you, Arturo, you don't think this business of recalling the dead is all rot, do you?"

"No," Benito answered slowly, "I don't say it's all rot. But most of it is. I don't doubt there may be isolated individual instances that might make one sit up and take notice. There must have been something real to give the fakers groundwork for their machinations. What it is I don't pretend to have the faintest idea. If I really thought there was any way of reaching Frank I'd be the first one to aid you. You evidently have a theory?"

"I certainly have!" Lawrence's words tripped over each other in the haste to get themselves said. "Both as to what sent him out, and as to how we might reach him. Farthy believes he took poison. I can't agree with him. Gordoan didn't look like a man who'd taken poison. He looked like a man asleep. There wasn't any vibration of poison around his body. I'm sensitive to vibrations, and I'd stake

my life on that! See here, Arturo, didn't you say that poppy was red?"

"The poppy tossed at my feet? But certainly! Why!"

"Just an added proof. A yellow or pink one would not have been so positive a proof. Gordon was mad about poppies. Red poppies. Had 'em all over his place."

"I remember," Benito replied, nodding. "Something about France, wasn't it? Flanders!"

"Yes." Lawrence dropped his voice to a whisper. "He and Farthy went through the war together. Frank used to say he could never forget the poppies over there, thousands of 'em. Red field poppies. He said every poppy was born of a pint of blood. And when he built his new house—you've never seen it, worse luck—he planted a perfectly huge bed of those red field poppies. In the center of the bed he mapped out a star-shaped piece of turf, across which he wrote with some kind of bright red moss: "LEST WE FORGET." Farthingale said it was sentiment. Hates sentiment. Sneers at it. But after Gordon died old Farthy buys a potted poppy and places it in his living room. It must be about ready to bloom by this time."

"**S**AY, you two!" Farthingale paused, turned and waited till Benito and Lawrence had caught up with him and Wasson. "Let's ditch the grill and go up to my place. I'll have old George beat up an omelet and dig up a bottle. What say?"

The suggestion met with warm assent and approval, but to both Benito and Lawrence the poppy about to bloom was a far greater lure than the promised omelet and bottle. The four men sauntered on together, and conversation languished between the singer and the architect concerning the dead man. Some fifteen minutes later the quartet of comrades entered the doctor's roomy house, settled com-

fortably in the living room and fell into a lazy, desultory round of talk as they waited George's culinary triumph.

Involuntarily Benito made a swift survey of the room in search of the poppy. It stood conspicuously on the library table set into the deep bay window, planted in an ordinary florist's pot of large size. The foliage had attained luxurious growth, but there was no blossom visible. It was one of those big oriental poppies which send forth numerous consecutive blooms before their season is done. Involuntarily, as he had sought the poppy with his eyes, Benito spoke.

"When will your poppy bloom, Doc?" The singer's question brought Farthingale round with a start. The doctor had been standing by the floor register, conversing in low tones with Wasson. He passed off his start with a nonchalant shrug, frowned, glanced quickly at the poppy and replied lightly:

"Oh, it has already bloomed three times. I cut off the flowers and threw them away. They—they weren't the right color." He turned back to Wasson almost abruptly, as if he would avoid further questioning anent his pet plant.

Benito raised his brows at Lawrence. Then without any further word the singer got to his feet and crossed the room for the purpose of more closely inspecting the poppy. Three blunt stem ends showed plainly where Farthingale had clipped the blooms. But from the very center of the plant rose another bud. It was, as yet, only a hard green bulb through which showed no hint of a petal to disclose the color of the flower. As Benito returned to his seat he caught both Lawrence and Farthingale watching him closely. The doctor's expression was baffling, but Lawrence's was patently eager and intent.

As a matter of fact, Lawrence's thoughts were beginning to assume

the belligerent. Farthy's touchiness over his poppy was transparent; he didn't want to be suspected of sentimentality. But what was under both Farthingale's and Wasson's assumption of crass unbelief?

Lawrence rather suspected them of a jealously guarded susceptibility. But how to reach it? He had tried a number of ways to pierce their armor; subtle insinuation, candid inquiry, veiled statement. It had got him nowhere. Well, he'd just try the bombing system! Certainly events had played into his hand this evening—Benito's recital of his poppy experience in *Monna Vanna*—Wasson's first earnest reply to his own ideas—the excursion to Farthingale's house. Here was his chance. Right in the lion's den he would turn over that hole card!

He leaned forward in his chair and said firmly: "See here, Farthy. Your claim concerning Gordoon's death is absurd. Why should he *want* to die? He didn't. I know it. If ever a man wanted to live it was Frank Gordoon. And though he didn't intend going so far, I believe he was responsible for his own death. That is—if he's dead."

"What!" Farthingale wheeled with a sharp ejaculation and stared at the architect.

"Personally," Lawrence went on smoothly, ignoring him, "I'm not so sure Frank is dead." A moment he hesitated. All along he had been mild and noncombatant under their jibes. Well, taste or no taste, he'd give them some of their own medicine. He finished curtly: "If I could get a little assistance from you poor dolts we might be able to call him back."

"Shall I have a padded cell fitted out for you?" Wasson put in with mock solicitude. "Or will an ordinary one do?"

"Oh, leave him alone, he's harmless." Farthingale lit his pipe and flipped the match into the stand-tray

beside him. "I have no doubt whatever that poison did for Frank. Some of those little-known poisons that leave no trace. I fancy you're quite right when you say he went farther than he intended, Larry. For about two years he had been experimenting with such poisons. Some East Indian lore set him going on them."

"East Indian lore! That's at the bottom of the whole hideous business!" Lawrence cut the doctor short. "Farthy, tell Arturo and Bob what happened when Frank had the typhoid three years ago."

"He asked us never to repeat it," Farthingale objected. "What good can it do?"

"A lot of good. When he asked us never to repeat it he certainly never suspected any such contingency as this. Go ahead. Tell 'em, technically."

"Why—he died, that's all." Farthingale turned to Wasson and Benito and went on reluctantly. "Heart stopped beating. Pulse ceased. I closed his eyes and folded his hands—pronounced him dead. Then one of his hands moved slightly. I felt for his heart action. It had begun again. Larry was there. He and I and the nurse went to work like mad. Pulled old Frank through. But that's nothing so unusual. I don't know why he wanted it kept quiet, I'm sure."

"Well, I know!" Lawrence sprang to his feet, facing the other three. "When he was strong enough to talk again, he was all worked up over what had happened to him. You know what a colossal will the man had. Never saw anything like it! Well, when his heart stopped beating he was still fully conscious. Then he became aware that his jaw had dropped, his eyes rolled up. He tried to move 'em. Couldn't. Found that all control over his physical body had been suspended. He felt Farthy close his eyes and fold his hands. Heard him say he was dead. But — he determined he

wouldn't die. He set that irresistible will of his to remaining conscious. He kept saying over and over—"I will not lose consciousness—I *will not* lose consciousness"—steadily, like a mantram. Presently he felt a peculiar warmth in his chest. Tried to move one of his hands—the fingers twitched—heart began beating again. Now, what do you say happened?"

"Simple as A B C," Wasson answered. "His will kept him alive and the body was forced to go on functioning. The will's a powerful thing."

"At least, a will like Frank Gordon's," Benito put in.

"Right!" Lawrence glanced keenly at Farthingale, but the doctor remained silent. "That got under Frank's hide. That's what he didn't want repeated. He began brooding over it—the capacity of the will, you know. He came to the conclusion that if the will could bring him back, it *could send him out*. He bought a lot of books on mysticism and adeptship. *Hatha Yoga*, and all that stuff. This *Yoga* is a kind of Hindoo ascetic philosophy. By attaining a high degree of adeptship, the *Yogi* claims to obtain union with the universal spirit and accrue certain occult powers which free him from physical laws. The hindoo word *Yoga* means the union of the individual with the divine. The Hindoos have spread that doctrine since Heck was a pup. Well, Frank got going on that rigmarole. Took all kinds of queer exercises, dieting, posturing, breathing, intellectual concentration—in secret."

"Funny he never told me anything about it," interrupted Farthingale.

"Not at all," Lawrence answered sharply. "You're such a hard-boiled skeptic that he was afraid to discuss it with you. He knew I was ready to believe in anything occult that even approaches reason, so he came to me. He knew I wouldn't laugh at him, and he feared you would."

"I certainly should have," Farthingale admitted coldly. "In fact, I'm laughing now. Ridiculous!" His mouth corners lifted in a scornful chuckle of derision.

"It's you who are ridiculous!" Lawrence retorted harshly. "You're such a damned fatuous infidel! Frank knew you'd find that he was studying something Indian, so he told you he was investigating poisons. Poisons, hell! He was studying like all possessed on the ramifications of the will! I ask you to consider the will of Frank Gordon! He began to practise what he studied. He attained a certain amount of efficiency. He got so he could pass in and out of his body at his own pleasure. But he wouldn't stay over a few minutes. He was lured powerfully by the weird things he saw over there, but he was afraid he might remain out too long and find it impossible to get back. *And I tell you that is what happened!* He was so interested in that immense realm of the unknown that he overtaxed his as yet undeveloped technical ability, and when he came to returning to his body, he couldn't quite accomplish it."

"Man alive, Larry, you can't really believe that?" Benito leaned forward in consternation. The doctor had lost his sneer, and Wasson's face was wry with a queer expression of baffled bewilderment.

"I do believe it!" Lawrence began pacing the floor. Suddenly he stopped directly in front of the three grouped over the register. "Why, you poor, stupid unbelievers! I've got to jolt you out of your complacent materialism. Those Hindoos attained an astounding degree of adeptship. Frank told me of one chap who left his body in a trance. According to pre-arranged plans with some of his buddies who believed in him, these buddies buried the body in a vault, sowed wheat over it, allowed the wheat to grow, mature and ripen. Mowed the

wheat, opened the vault and disinterred the body. The adept came back from out there, reassumed his body, got up and thanked them. And the body had been buried six months."

"How is that possible?" Benito interrupted. "How could the body escape disintegration? Why, they can't even allow a man to remain too long in a state of hypnotism. The natural poisons of the body, not being thrown off through regular channels, would cause death."

"Frank explained that, too," Lawrence replied swiftly. His face was drawn, his eyes blazing with eagerness to master their unbelief. "He said there was a kind of tenuous inner body attached to the physical organism, called the astral body. In sleep the spirit, or what we know as the intelligence, enters the astral body and roams at will on the astral plane, which is an etheric counterpart of the physical plane. Hence dreams. The astral body is attached to the physical by an elastic cord, similar to the umbilical cord which attaches the body of an unborn child to its mother. So long as that cord remains unbroken the forces of energy, which give life, sustain life and *are* life, continue to flow through the physical, and the body remains in a perfect state of preservation. Poisonous effluvia can neither permeate nor accumulate, since all animation is suspended. Only when that astral cord is severed does death take place, the body become mere unenergized matter, and disintegration ensue. The adept merely assumes the astral body and leaves the physical in a trance-like sleep."

"But, Larry—"

"Don't interrupt me!" Lawrence turned upon Wasson savagely. "That's what happened to Frank. Think of it! There he roams, out in the vast space of the unknown. What terrors he may be encountering, what horrible suffering he may be enduring, longing to get back, despairing,

unable to accomplish return without aid! And you, who could help him, you sit around here and sneer like a lot of idiotic Doubting Thomases and let him wander, and let his body lie in a vault until something snaps that cord and all we knew of him rots in the ground!"

"My God! What a ghastly hypothesis!" breathed Wasson.

"Hypothesis!" Lawrence leaned over Wasson with blazing eyes, pounding his right fist into his left palm frantically. "There you go! Hypothesis! It's no hypothesis. It's true—true—*true*, I tell you! I know! Frank follows me around day and night. He knows I believed. I've tried to reach him. Tried and tried till I'm half mad with my impotency! I've got to have aid. I can't reach him *alone*!"

"Let's try to be calm." Benito's voice shook as he said it. "Granting that such might be the case, wasn't the body embalmed?"

"No." Farthingale's face was white. "His blood drained from his veins? His heart pierced by a scalpel? Frank was nearer than a brother. I couldn't stand the thought of it. I insisted that he be buried just as he was laid out. Couldn't even stand having him buried in the ground—food for worms." Farthingale shivered. "I had him placed in a pine coffin in a vault, right where the sun shines through the door full over his face. He—he loved the sun!" Farthingale's face twitched.

"You think it was sentiment guiding you!" Lawrence turned his burning eyes on the doctor. "Farthy—it was Frank himself influencing you. He knew if his body was embalmed the last chance was gone. Do you think that magnificent will would give up, even after he found return impossible? Even after his body was buried? Even after you persisted in your puerile unbelief and accepted his loss? No! Not he! He's driving me,

driving me! I can't sleep! I can't eat! I can't even think any more! He won't let me rest till I've gone to the last ditch in an effort to help him get back!"

"Good God! If such a thing were true!" Wasson whispered.

"I've told you it is true!" The architect clenched his hands and shook them in the air. "And if we four would set our wills together, calling him, believing, we could reach him. Right here and now! But I can't do it alone! My God! I can't do it—*alone!* And there he lies in that vault, and we argue and fume like a pack of asinine imbeciles, and any moment he may go beyond our reach!"

"No, sir!" Wasson sprang to his feet. His face had gone whiter than Farthingale's. "If there is the remotest chance that you're right we're going to do our damndest to bring that man back to us. Tell us what to do."

"That goes for me, too," Benito concurred quietly, rising. But his eyes sputtered like burning powder. Lawrence's face quivered, and he turned to Farthingale, breathing heavily, like a man at the end of a long race.

"Farthy—you? We can't do it as an experiment. You've got to *believe!*" Farthingale's face was pasty, and the lines in his cheeks deepened like scars. His mouth worked convulsively as he answered:

"I *want* to believe!" In his tense utterance the doctor dropped all pretense of jeering skepticism. "Don't you understand? I want to—but I can't. You've called me a rank materialist. I am. But if Frank could come back there's no man on earth would go farther to help him accomplish it than I!"

A SIGH breathed in Lawrence's ears, a sigh of relief, of hope. He glanced sharply around the group.

"Who sighed?"

Each man shook his head. Lawrence's face was the color of chalk. "Frank! Frank! He's here! I tell you he's here right now! He knows what we're trying to do. Oh, my God, Farthy, it rests with you! Believe! Can't you *believe!*"

"I would if I could!" Farthingale's face worked uncontrollably. "If Frank is really here, he knew me. He knew how I felt. If he still exists here—there—anywhere—can't he give me a sign by which I can know him? If this is true and not some fantastic distortion of the imagination, he has untold power. Why, those Hindoos could make furniture rise in the air—make unseen instruments play exquisite music—make plants grow and bloom before your eyes. A sign! Can't he give us a sign?"

Farthingale's words were followed by a silence, a silence that settled over the room and gripped them into rigidity. And in the middle of it Lawrence cried out, pleading:

"Frank! A sign! *Give us a sign!*" In the deathlike hush that followed Benito whispered wildly:

"God Almighty—look at the poppy!"

THE eyes of the four men turned as one to the florist's pot on the table across the room. From the center of the foliage the bud was rising on its stem, slowly, steadily, as if all the force of creation were behind it. Steadily the calyx began to open. Steadily the petals within it unfolded and spread backward. Before them, settling into motionless calm, stood a full-blown poppy, crimson as new blood.

"Frank!" Farthingale's voice quivered, broke, raised to a cry. "Frank! The other three blooms I cut from that plant were spotless *white!* Oh, God! *Frank!*"

"Quick!" Lawrence seized the doctor's hand. "Join hands—into a circle—flow of magnetism! Quickly! Set your mind on Frank. Close your eyes. Call up a mental picture of his face. Call him! Call him! Frank—we believe!"

Acting like automatons, the other men obeyed him. Strained faces lifted, eyes closed, every atom of conscious intelligence exerted in an attempt to reach the man who had gone beyond. Silence! What a silence! Aching! Potent—tense—racking! Then another presence—surely, intangibly, vague as the wind, but another presence! And a voice! Out of the air over their heads—a voice. The voice of Frank Gordon.

"At last! God, I thought I'd never get you! I stayed too long—couldn't get back! The astral cord still intact. All I need is—a little help—from that side. Help—will you help?"

"God in heaven—yes! Of course! Tell us what to do!" It was Farthingale, the unbeliever.

"Go get my body. Instantly! Bring it here. Quick! Any moment may be too late!"

The whisper faded, and for a time the men remained locked in the vise of their emotion. Then Farthingale broke the circle with a mighty oath.

"Come on! What are we waiting for? Didn't you hear what he said? Any moment may be too late! Come on!"

OUT the door in a wild scramble. Down the stairs. Into Farthingale's high-powered car. It was a mad ride through the night. Farthingale at the wheel disregarded alike petty obstacles and speed laws. The great motor roared into the cemetery, coughed to a perilous halt. The men ripped down the top of the touring car and went on a run to the vault. Farthingale whipped out his key, flung back the door, and rushed into

the burial place. By the aid of his flashlight they located the black pine coffin enclosing the body of Frank Gordon. They lowered the bier, carried it outside, relocked the vault gate of griled ironwork, hurried the coffin to the car and placed it across the tonneau.

Farthingale leaped under the wheel and the other three wedged into the tonneau to hold the coffin from slipping. Slower was the homeward journey. Farthingale took a round-about road leading to his place, keeping a sharp lookout for late pedestrians. Once safely arrived, the men carried their burden into the house and placed it on the floor of the living room.

Lawrence knelt, turned the screws, lifted the lid and laid it on the floor. Four badly shaken men stared into the still face of Frank Gordon. And it was, as Lawrence had said, the face of a man asleep. The face of a man in a deep trance. Suspended animation showed in every line of the thin features, but very certainly they lacked the peculiar rigidity of death. Still staring, Lawrence got to his feet, held out his hands, motioning the men into their former position.

"We've done it, Frank," he whispered. "What now?"

Again they stood with raised faces and closed eyes, in a circle, this time around the head of the coffin. And after a long silence again came the echo of Frank Gordon's voice.

"Will. That's all. Will that I shall come back. Lord—what I've seen—what I can tell! It's now or never. Farthy—as you loved me. will—will—will that I shall return!"

For a moment stark terror paralyzed them. Terror of this thing they faced, the unknown that held him they had once cherished as closest and dearest. Terror of their own impotency. Terror of the clay-cold body at their feet. Then the love of man for man triumphed in the crisis.

With a mighty upheaval of spirit, every one of them called upon every faculty at his command, and that concerted force surged upward, calling to Frank Gordoan.

The atmosphere became charged with some unnamable energy. The very air was alive, pulsing like an animate thing. Then suddenly it seemed to Farthingale that he was Benito, Lawrence, Wasson, himself, all rolled into one. To each man came the same weird impression. They were fused into one personality, one individuality, one soul, willing, calling, crying out in a terrible silence to Frank Gordoan.

Then they became aware of the dominating, overpowering presence of Gordoan himself. Each man was four, the four one, and each man was more than all the conduit for the spirit of the man who lay at their feet. Then with unconceivable quickness the air cleared, settled, became normal. Each man felt the passing of the other spirit from his immediate atmosphere. Each man lost the consciousness of the other three. Each man was again himself—himself alone.

IN THE wake of that great moment the four felt a terrific let-down. Felt their wills fall back upon themselves, spent. Weakened, shaken with the great effort expended, the material brain slowly resumed its commonplace functioning. And as they stood so, still with closed eyes, Lawrence was the first to speak.

"Too late!"

"Failed! God!" Farthingale whispered, stricken. "Fool's errand! Serves us right! Robbing a grave in the dead of the night. Trying to override the laws of the universe. Frank! Frank!"

They were afraid to open their eyes. Afraid to look at the body of the man who had been. What now—with the cord broken—the spirit passed farther into that vast unknown? Dust! Dust! Then a chuckle reached their ears. A hearty, amused chuckle. And a voice:

"Farthy, you poor old decadent agnostic! Look at your poppy!"

The men broke from the circle, springing back involuntarily at the well-remembered tones. Eyes flew open, faces blanched, necks craned forward. Frank Gordoan, the flush of life banishing the pallor of his skin, was sitting up in the black coffin. He chuckled again at the expressions chasing each other across the features of his old comrades—fear, incredulity, belief, hysterical delight—but this time the chuckle was tinged with warmest affection.

"Why, we pulled it off, you infants!" He stretched his arms, tentatively feeling his weakened, lax muscles. "I'm here! Do I have to get up and clean the whole bunch before you can believe your eyes? Here, help me out of this damned box. I'm lippy as a sick kitten. Farthy, go tell George to make that omelet for five—but first, look at your poppy!"

The eyes of the men turned with concerted gaze to the library table. The single bloom on the spreading plant was as white as alabaster.

