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# Haunted

by  
JACK  
BRADLEY



CITY streets are lonely in the small hours of the morning, and Officer Cardigan, just going off duty, was glad to see the big police car draw up beside him. For one thing it would mean a lift downtown which would save a long wait for a surface car. Besides the patrolman at the wheel, the car contained a captain of detectives, a police stenographer and Dr. Hughes, the stubby, explosive little police surgeon attached to his precinct. Cardigan knew they had been up at the city hospital trying to obtain a confession from "Sniffy" Callers before he died.

"Any luck?" he called out as the car stopped.

"No," the captain of detectives replied, "he wouldn't say a word. Just

laughed at us. But, anyway, we—holy Mike! What's this coming?"

Cardigan turned about to follow his gaze. Down the street a man came running. He was barefoot and clad only in pajamas and he ran as if all the devils of Asia pursued him. Seeing the officers, he gave a hoarse cry and raced toward them. As he drew nearer they could see that he was a tall young man, slight of build, with dead white hair and a face that was a mask of horror and suffering. He stumbled to a halt before Cardigan

# Hands



"Merciful God! If I could only forget that song of the pit!"

and thrust out his hands, close together, his throat working convulsively in an effort to speak. The officers were already climbing out of the car.

"Your handcuffs!" the man gasped when he could speak. "Your handcuffs! In the name of pity, put the good, clean steel on these damned things from the Pit! They have killed her! Killed her! Killed the woman I loved! Ah! Ah! Ah!"

He was babbling incoherently,

shaking his hands before Cardigan. And Officer Cardigan, who had seen every horror that the metropolis has to show to a policeman, looked down at this man's hands and gasped. They were the hands of a strangler, those hands. Long and lean and dark they were and they looked inhumanly powerful. As Cardigan stared at them the lean cruel fingers were twisting and writhing like a nest of dark snakes.

But the thing that had caused Cardigan to exclaim was the startling impression those hands gave him. In some indefinable way he *knew* those hands were separate entities, *knew*

that they possessed a life of their own apart from the man who wore them! Dazedly he fumbled with his handcuffs.

"Put them on him, Cardigan." It was the cold, unemotional voice of the doctor, and as the handcuffs clicked he shook the man sharply. "Come now! The good, clean steel is on your wrists. You are safe now. Tell us what the trouble is."

The doctor had dealt with madmen before. At the touch of the cold steel, the man had quieted as if from an opiate. He looked down at his manacled hands and nodded dully.

"Yes," he said, "yes, I'll tell you. Come with me."

He climbed into the car and gave the address of an apartment house near by. When they reached the place he led them to an apartment on the ground floor. At the door of the bedroom, he stopped and pointed silently.

On the wildly disordered bed the body of a girl was lying. Her torn and mangled throat showed the manner of her death, but surely no human hands could have mangled a throat as this poor girl's throat had been mangled. The vertebræ had been snapped like a match stick and the muscles squeezed apart like a crushed orange. The doctor stared in utter disbelief at the girl's throat and then turned to look at those weird hands, now writhing and straining at the handcuffs. He stared for a moment longer at the torn throat of the girl, then drew a sheet over the poor form and turned from the room.

"Come away," he said to the man. "And now tell us how it happened."

With a strong effort, the man drew his eyes away from the grisly thing on the bed and led the way into the living-room. Each man felt a peculiar sensation of being watched, the sensation that men sometimes feel in the midst of the jungle, an instinct that is handed down from the Elder World. They glanced about and lo-

cated the source of the feeling at once.

It was a grand piano. A magnificent thing of carved walnut and great powerful lines, its dark grandeur dominated the room, seemed to overshadow it. The man glanced at the thing, then drew his eyes away with a shudder. Drearily waving the others into chairs around a table, he seated himself and began.

"MY NAME is William Tchianski," he said. "I am the adopted son of Wladimir Tchianski, the pianist, and she"—he nodded toward the murdered girl in the next room—"she is my wife, Helen. We were married a week ago."

"Why did you kill her?" interrupted the captain of detectives.

"I did not kill her. I loved her, more than anything else in the world. *They* killed her!"

He laid the dark, shackled hands on the table and stared dully at the writhing, twisting fingers.

"All right," the captain answered patiently, "why did *they* kill her?"

The man smiled gently. "You think I am mad, don't you? But I am not. Emotionally torn to pieces, yes, but not mad. And now, gentlemen, if you please, I should like to begin at the beginning and tell the story in my own way. Otherwise, you would not understand me."

He moved the writhing hands beneath the table and in a dull, lifeless monotone began his story.

"I was ten years old when Tchianski took me from the orphanage where I had been left a foundling. Why he selected me instead of one of the other boys at the orphanage, I do not know, but, on the train going home, he told me his reason for adopting a son.

"He was a pianist, he said, the greatest in the world, and he wanted someone to carry on his name and fame when he died. He would give me a home and the very best musical education obtainable, and in return I was to study hard and fit myself to

carry on his fame as a pianist when he died. It was a cold matter of business; from the very first he made it clear that there was no sentiment involved, but to me, freed at last from the rigid discipline of the orphanage, it seemed a godsend of kindness. Eagerly I agreed to work with all my might to carry out my part of the bargain.

"We left the train at Turgot, a small town upstate, and late that afternoon I saw the place that was to be my home until I reached manhood. The house was more like a grim, mediæval castle than a modern home. Built entirely of stone, its age-grimed turrets and walls were almost hidden by the thick, clinging tendrils of the ivy that blanketed them. The building was located in the center of the estate and the whole was surrounded by a high stone wall.

"Tchianski began at once with my musical education. I learned rapidly enough, but after a time it began to be apparent that my patron had made a bad selection. It was simply not in me to become a master and seemingly never would be. I could play the music that was put before me, yes. I could strike the notes that were indicated, strike them as accurately as a machine, but the flaming genius that enabled Tchianski to weave a glowing thing of flame and beauty from the cold keys of a piano was in me simply non-existent.

"When Tchianski was finally forced to the conclusion that I could never become the master player that he was, he was wild with rage. Pacing up and down the room, he would listen to my mechanical rendition of a selection and curse savagely. Then he would spring to the piano, shove me aside, and under his fingers the score that I had been playing like an automaton would become a shimmering thing of flame and glory. Often I begged him to give up the hopeless task and take some one who possessed

the talent I lacked. But, no, he would not admit failure.

"'There are ways,' he would mutter. 'Even with a machine like you, there are ways. Ways which those fools out there do not know!'

"His contemptuous gesture was toward the village but I knew that it included the whole wide world of sane normal men and women. For, down in the village, I had heard strange tales of this man. Tales of ghostly lights that had flickered through the gloomy old castle in the small hours of the night. Tales of dreadful orgies, of wild, evil chants, faintly heard, whispers of the Black Mass. Dreadful furtive tales that I had been too young to understand and had refused to believe when I grew old enough to understand.

"But as the years rolled by, I was forced to believe them. There were rooms in the house which I was sternly forbidden to enter. At times I was summarily ordered to pack a bag and leave the place for a specified length of time. And on a few very rare occasions I had caught glimpses of terrible books in Tchianski's study. As I grew into the understanding that comes with manhood, there could no longer be any doubt: this man who had taken me for his own was a worshipper of Satan, a priest of the Prince of Darkness. Oddly enough, I attached little importance to this when I was certain of the truth. It was to me very disgusting and suggestive of insanity, but nothing more.

"So the years rolled by until I reached manhood; then Tchianski died. I was in New York City at the time. There was no warning, merely a telegram commanding me to return at once. When I reached home he was seated in an armchair, fully dressed, apparently in the best of health. He gave me no word of greeting, only motioned me to a chair and broke the news without preamble.

“ ‘William,’ he said, ‘I am about to die. I have just six hours more to live and I have something to say before I go. No, no, do not interrupt. I know what you are going to say—a doctor and all the rest of the customary rigmarole. But a doctor could not help me. He could not even find anything the matter with me. No, it is to discuss your future, not mine, that I have called you. I want to know what you plan to do with your life when I am gone. I have made my will in your favor and there is plenty for you to finish your musical education under the best masters of Europe, if you will go on. That is what I want to know, if you intend to go on. There never was any pretense of affection between us and there will be none now. I want no sobbing vows. I only want a candid statement of your intentions. That is all.’

“The great, dark head was held coldly erect and those blazing eyes were boring into my brain, searching out every hidden corner.

“ ‘You know the answer, sir,’ I told him. ‘When you took me from that orphanage, we made a certain bargain: that in exchange for your care of me, I was to study and fit myself to carry on your name as a pianist when you died. Every day of my life since that time, I have done my best to carry out my part of that bargain, and if you are really near to death, you can rest assured that I shall do my best in the future as I have in the past. But you know that I have no talent for music and I can not promise success. I can only promise to do my best.’

“Tchianski leaned forward in his chair and stared tensely into my eyes for a long moment. When he spoke, his voice was very low and tense.

“ ‘Listen to me, William. You have heard strange tales of me down there in the village. Tales of dread rituals. Tales of a power that or-

dinary men do not possess. Tales that you may or may not have believed. *But those tales are true, William!* I do possess those powers and I know too much to be balked of my plans by what those fools call death. Alone, you would never be anything but an automaton, but you will not be alone. Oh, no, you will not be alone. Far from it. Listen to me, boy!

“ ‘You know my wishes. Obey them and I will send these hands of mine back from the grave to play for you. *Refuse, and by the power of the Pit I will send these same hands back from the grave to strangle you!*’

“He lifted his hands—*these* hands, gentlemen—and shook them before my eyes. For months they haunted me. Those dark, cruel hands, with their lean, writhing fingers.

“**W**HEN I entered his study the next morning, I found him dead. He was seated in his armchair, sternly erect, gazing straight ahead as one who waits the coming of an expected messenger. All of his books and other objects dealing with Satanism had been destroyed, and in a neat pile at his side lay all of his business papers, including his will, ready for me. On the top of the pile lay a paper containing the directions for his burial. To my surprize, there was nothing particularly objectionable in these directions. He merely stated that ‘as certain events made it impossible for him to be buried by members of his own faith, he was to be buried without aid of clergy and with as little publicity as possible.’

“When his attorney called the next day to help me straighten out his affairs, I learned with a shock that it would be utterly impossible for me to carry out his plans as I had meant to do; for the fortune he left me consisted of mining stock as worthless as so much waste paper. Like many men of genius, he had no more business acumen than a child. I had to sell the house and furniture to meet his debts

and pay the funeral expenses. When it was over, I had little more than the clothes upon my back with which to face the world. And his piano. I kept that, of course.

"There was only one thing to do. Go to work at once and, when I had sufficient money saved, to take up my musical studies again, as he had wished. Almost immediately I obtained a position with the company of which I am now an officer. I loved the work and plunged into it wholeheartedly. Twelve and sixteen hours a day I was working, and I was making wonderful progress. But there was no time for anything but work, and for two years his piano sat there untouched.

"And then I met Helen."

The man paused wearily, and Cardigan held a glass of water to his lips. The man drank and then went on with his story, speaking in the same dull, lifeless monotone.

"I had been sent by my firm to show her some property about which she had inquired, and it was, with me, a case of love at first sight. I was completely captivated by this lovely, gentle girl and I was soon calling upon her regularly. She was a concert pianist, and already she was beginning to make a name for herself. Gradually I told her something of my early life. I did not tell her of my patron's Satan-worship nor of his gruesome dying threat but I did tell her of how he had taken me from an orphanage and how I expected to take up the study of music as soon as I had money enough. When I told her of Tchianski's piano and how it had sat there untouched for two years, she expressed a wish to see the instrument, and one day, at the termination of a shopping tour, I took her to my apartment to see the piano of the great Tchianski.

"That was less than a month ago, but it seems a thousand years. We were so happy, then, like two laughing children, as I took her hand and led

her up to that diabolical piano. She seated herself and played a selection she had brought with her. As her dainty fingers rippled up and down the keyboard, that damnable thing seemed to stir itself like some slimy dragon slowly coming to life. I could *feel* the thing, just as you gentlemen can, do doubt, feel it now.

"But Helen seemed to notice nothing unusual. Or perhaps she was too much absorbed in the music she was playing—a new opera, a prison song—and under her trained fingers the music swelled up into a sobbing song of heartbreak and passion. When she had finished she arose and laughingly insisted that it was my turn now.

"Just why I seated myself at the piano, I do not know. Certainly I should never, in my normal state, have made myself ridiculous by attempting that complicated score after two years without practise. But something seemed to draw me toward that unholy piano. Like a man in a daze I seated myself and aimlessly dropped my hands on the keyboard.

"Then something in me snapped and I was playing; or rather my hands were playing, for I was conscious of not one note of that music! I was staring dully at the score and it registered in my brain as nothing more than a white blur. Like a man in a trance, I sat there and my fingers were flying back and forth across the keyboard like demons of hell, suddenly released.

"Beneath those flying fingers the music rose up and up, into a wailing thing of glory. Helen had played the score with all the consummate skill of an artist, but her rendition had been pale and colorless beside this mad thing that was being woven beneath my fingers.

"When I had finished, there were tears in Helen's eyes and she poured out a flood of eager questions—questions to which I had no answer, for I was as puzzled as she. Not for a

moment would I believe that my patron had really been able to keep his promise to send his hands back from the grave to play for me; that savored too much of mediæval superstition. Yet I could think of no other reasonable explanation. I made some fumbling answer to Helen's questions and took her home as soon as possible.

**I** HAD no sleep that night—had I but known it, that night was the forerunner of so many other nights when I was not to sleep—but I did decide upon the only sensible course to be taken. I would tell Helen the things I had not told her before, and together we would find a solution to the mystery if there was one to be found.

“When I called upon Helen the next evening, I told her the things I had not cared to mention before. I told her of my patron's Satan-worship and of the gruesome threat he had made before dying. Then I told her of how I had played that music, the evening before, without being conscious of a note of it.

“When I had finished my story she was as puzzled as I. Like myself, she would not believe that Tehianski actually possessed the power to do the thing he had threatened, but, like myself, she could think of no other explanation of what had happened. The best that she could do was to suggest that I experiment by playing the piano as much as possible and trust to time to solve the mystery.

“And so began what was surely the strangest test ever undertaken by two people. Night after night I sat before that damnable piano and played while Helen sat enraptured listening to the wild glories that my fingers evoked without direction from my mind. I tried to play upon other pianos and found that upon them my hands would not play with the same ease.

“So it was that each night I came back to that Satanic piano and Helen sat, tense, listening to those glorious, hell-born symphonies. Night after night I played, and day after day my contacts with the sane, normal people of the business world seemed more and more like a dream. Only the nighttime seemed real, when I could sit before that piano and listen to my hands weave those crashing symphonies from the Pit. Then, so suddenly that it was like a crashing blow to a man stumbling through a dark room, I discovered the truth!

“From the first night at the piano, it had seemed to me that my hands were growing longer and darker. I had thought it merely a hallucination born of the emotional stress under which I was laboring, and it was more to quiet my own fears than in any real question that I made a careful measurement of them. When I measured them again, my brain sickened in horror. There could be no doubting the cold figures before me. My hands were rapidly growing longer and already they were much darker.

“That night when I seated myself at the piano I received the final confirmation, if any had been needed. No sooner was I seated than my hands fairly leaped upon the keys. But it was no mere riot of song that was being played by those hands now. It was a message that was being told to me by the singing keys, a message that I could understand as plainly as the spoken word—the voice of the Satanist, Tehianski, exulting that at last I knew, demanding that I yield my will to his and become his creature.

“If I would obey—the singing keys whispered to me a tale of stately glory—of fame—the adulation of beautiful women—gold—a power that was greater than that of man—all these things would be mine if I would obey.

“If I refused—the music changed



its joyous tempo. It breathed terrible threats—lewd hints of forgotten arts—of things that sane men should never know. There were secrets, the singing keys whispered, dread secrets of the Pit, and if a man were willing to pay the price for those secrets, he could reach back—even through the Veil, he could reach back—to strike at those who refused to obey his will.

“I remember screaming and straining to jerk my hands away from the keyboard—straining with all my might as they clung to the keys like quicksand. Then everything went black before me. For the first time in my life, I had fainted.

“WHEN I had regained consciousness, Helen was bending over me frantic with fear, terrified as much by that unholy music as by my fainting. For while she had not understood as clearly as I the message those keys had whispered, she had understood their evil import.

“When I told Helen that there could no longer be any doubt that Tchianski had been able to keep his promise—that the hands upon my wrists were his, not mine—she nodded in agreement.

“‘Yes, I have really been sure of it for days now, and so have you, I am sure. And there is only one thing to do. You must never touch a piano again, Billy. You could be the greatest pianist in the world, but it would be at the price of your soul and that is a price too great to pay. No matter what promise you made to him, you can break it with honor when your soul is the price of its fulfilment. Once you have been away from the piano for a while, he will lose whatever hold he has upon you. Of that I am sure.’

“‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘I feel that I can honorably break my promise after this. And I am sure that he knows our decision. But if he is here, listening to us, it is only just that I

should go to the piano one more time to hear his final word. And after tonight, I shall never touch a piano again. Somehow, I hope that he will understand and forgive me.’

“With Helen’s anxious eyes upon me, I walked to the piano and seated myself. The instant that I touched the keys there was a wild jangle of sound from the piano. Then the dark hands were racing up and down the keys like mad beasts, pouring out a wild, incoherent scream of hate! hate! hate!

“Helen shrieked and leaped to my side, trying to tear my hands from the keyboard. I added my strength to hers but we were as helpless as two children in the grip of a giant. On and on that mad song of hate played, gradually changing its tone. It was lower now, low and tense like the snarl of a cornered beast. Over and over the keys whispered that snarling tale of a hate that would never die, never relent, until its victim had been drawn through the Veil to it. Lower and lower the music sank until it dared to whisper that even after death there would be a ghastly vengeance out there in the dark. Suddenly I realized with a cry of horror that this devil’s tale of hate and vengeance was not for me alone—that it was directed at the woman I loved as much as at myself. For the second time that evening, I fainted.

“This time, when I regained consciousness, there was no Helen bending over me. She, too, had understood that low, snarling threat and had fainted. When I saw her pale, lovely face before me and realized the danger she had faced with me, I gave silent thanks that I had not yet declared my love. At least I could spare her. I would at once drop out of her life, and with me would go, I thought, the menace of this thing from the Pit.

“When I had brought her back to consciousness, I told her of my deci-

sion. And then I learned the full depths of a gentle woman's love.

"She looked at me tenderly for a moment then. 'You've loved me for a long time, now, haven't you, Billy?' she asked.

"There was no blush on her face as she spoke, no false modesty of drooping head, only a great, tender love. I could only nod, dumbly.

"'I know,' she continued. 'I have known for a long time, now. And I've loved you even longer. Don't you see, beloved, that no matter what he can do to us it will not be so hard to bear as separation would be? No, Billy, we will fight this thing together, and if he wins here, we will go out there in the dark to face him—still together. *And in the end we will win, beloved, for love is the greatest power in the universe. No matter what weapons he has, they will not overcome such love as ours.*'

"We sat there for a long time, huddled in each other's arms, like two frightened children, comforting each other, and then I took her home.

"When I returned home I was almost calm, and happier than I had been for days. No matter what horror was in store for me, I should not have to face it alone. There was a great flood of love in my heart for this gentle, loving girl who was facing death and worse than death for love of me, and the memory of her warm lips on mine was like a benediction. For the first time in many weary nights, I fell asleep as soon as I retired.

"I do not know how long I slept, but suddenly I was aware that my bedroom was filled with a clammy cold, a chill draft that seemed to bear the stench of the charnel-house. Above my head hovered a shadow that was dimly visible as being darker than the rest of the room. And from the shadow glared the burning eyes of Tchianski, the Satanist! Closer and closer to me came the dreadful eyes, and now I could see

the cruel strangler hands below them. Then a voice sounded, a voice that was low and tense—like that music I had played a few hours ago.

"'Since you have broken your vow, William, I have returned to keep mine.'

"Steadily the cruel hands moved closer to my throat, closer and yet closer as I desperately struggled to rise and throw myself out of their path. It was like that phenomenon known as a dream within a dream, where a sleeper in the throes of a horrible nightmare struggles to awaken himself.

"Mad with horror, I watched—I felt—those damnable hands creep up my chest—up—up, until I felt them fasten about my throat, felt my breath cut off and dimly felt my own desperate struggle to throw off those strangling hands. It seemed that I went through long eons of torture before I awoke—to find my hands clutched about my throat in a strangling hold that left great blue marks upon my throat for days. My hands! *His hands!*

"Of what followed, I have no clear recollection. I have fragmentary memories of running through the streets, babbling incoherent things as I ran. Somehow, I found myself battering at the door of Helen's apartment, and I can remember her terrified scream when she opened the door and saw me, but the rest of the night was only a nightmare memory of crouching in her arms trying to ward off the memory of those dreadful hands. When morning came she brought a mirror to me. Overnight, my hair had turned white and my face was lined with the horror I had experienced.

"'And now,' she said quietly, 'we are going to be married at once. Never again, beloved, will you face those horror-filled nights alone. Always, hereafter, you will have me by your side to help you in this dreadful fight.'

"And I yielded. There is no excuse I can offer for what I did. At first, of course, I begged her to leave me to face the thing alone. I even told her that I would leave the city at once in order to move the danger away from her. But in the end, I yielded. For one thing, I was sure that she was marked for vengeance as well as I, by that thing from the Pit; that, even if I fled, she would eventually face it, and it were better that we face it together. But it was more than a mere matter of reasoning. It was her calm and oft-reiterated statement that 'no matter what he can do to us, it will not be so hard to bear as separation.' Love like ours does not often come to men. That day we slipped over into Connecticut and were quietly married. She packed a few things in a bag and we came to my apartment to live."

The man shifted warily in his chair. Cardigan brought him another glass of water. Then he went on, speaking more rapidly as if anxious to be done with his story.

"THAT was a week ago, gentlemen. A week, but it seems like a lifetime in hell. A week without sleep, gentlemen. Do you know what it means to live for a week without the blessed release of sleep? To fight with all your might against sleep, knowing that it would bring death? Time and again I would drift into slumber and awake to find Helen tugging desperately at a pair of dark hands that were at my throat—hands that were hands from the Pit though they were attached to my wrists. Outside, on the street, people were passing—sane, normal people going about the prosy, everyday round of life, and inside we crouched in each other's arms like two children afraid of the dark.

"It will, no doubt, seem strange to you that we did nothing but cower

there and wait—that we availed ourselves of none of the aids of modern civilization. But, somehow, we knew that it would be useless, that nothing could be done unless we could prove our will stronger than his. Oh, yes, we talked of various things. Travel. A doctor. But we knew that it would only mean death in some madhouse, and death was not the worst thing we feared now. Already we were beginning to plan our real fight—our fight against him out there in the dark, when we had passed through the Veil.

"And so the week dragged slowly through, with its nights of horror and its days of dreadful waiting. Yesterday I received a letter from the management of the Turgot Cemetery where Tchianski was buried. The cemetery is being moved to make way for a dam, and the letter was to notify me that his grave would be opened today. It started a new train of thought in my mind. Perhaps if I went there and obtained his remains and burned them to ashes, it would help in our fight against him. As I thought the matter over, I grew almost hopeful. Perhaps I could even snatch an hour or so of sleep while she watched over me.

"And when I awoke again I was seated at the piano and playing!

"Merciful God! If I could only forget that Song of the Pit that those damned hands were playing! It was a wild pæan of—triumph! A devil's jubilee, a dirge played in utter, joyous syncopation. A chant of all the demons of hell as they chanted their devilish tales in my ears. And over it all his voice shouting a hellish song of victory in my suddenly comprehending ears! God! how his wild laughter rang out under those flying fingers! How gleefully the singing keys chuckled and whispered their grisly tale to me—of how those evil hands had waited—waited patiently

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# Haunted Hands

(Continued from page 761)

until she had fallen asleep and then had crept up to her soft throat.

“On and on that wild song of triumph played, whispering its ghastly tale to me, hour after hour until, numb with exhaustion, I managed to tear myself away from the piano. I did not look at her. I knew only too well what had happened. I rushed out into the street, brought you gentlemen here, and the rest you know.

“I suppose you will want to place me under arrest, now, charge me with murder and go through with all the formality of the law. Do so, if you wish. It matters very little what you do with me. The end is only a matter of a few hours at best. Very soon, now, I must sleep. And when I sleep again, he will conquer. That is one of the things he told me through that hellish music last night.

“And I am anxious to have it over with, to go to her out there in the dark and stand beside her when she faces him and his followers from the Pit. And, somehow, I *know* that, out there, we shall win. She said that love is the greatest power in the universe—that no power of hell could overcome a love like ours. And I believe! Yes, yes, I am quite anxious to have it over with and go to her out there where she is facing him.”

The man broke off and stared almost placidly into the gray dawn that was breaking through the windows. The captain of detectives blew his nose quite ostentatiously when he produced his handkerchief, but Cardigan and the other patrolman were frankly wiping their eyes.

“You poor devil!” It was the doctor who spoke. “And all the time you never thought of the one simple thing that would have saved you. Ropes, man! And that’s what we’ll

do with you now. Down at the station house we'll tie your hands to a bunk—even chain them if it will make you feel any better—and you can sleep for a week if you like. After that, you'll have to go through a trial, of course, but it will be very brief. A mere formality. In next to no time, you'll be out of it and in a comfortable sanitarium where you can receive treatment. And there's always hope, young man, always hope. Can't make any promises, of course—unusually severe case of hallucinations, induced by severe mental shock—but there's always hope. Yes, certainly there's always hope."

He cleared his throat briskly and fingered the leaves of his notebook. The man shook his head gently.

"You simply don't know him. You could set these hands into a concrete wall and still they would do his bidding. If—if you had heard them playing a few hours ago, you would understand. . . ."

IT WAS quite early the next afternoon when Dr. Hughes entered the station house—much earlier than his round of duties called for. Cardigan was bending over a newspaper as he entered.

"Well, Cardigan," the doctor asked, "how is our young man today?"

Cardigan looked up from the newspaper with bewilderment written large upon his face.

"Well—'tis a strange thing that has happened, Doctor. The lad is dead. You remember how we handcuffed his hands to the sides of his bunk, and, besides that, set that young rookie to watch beside him? Well, the rookie reports that about ten o'clock he got up and went to the end of the cell corridor for a drink of water. He swears that he was not gone more than three and a half or four minutes at the most, but when he got back, the lad was

strangled to death. 'And, Holy Mother, but you ought to see the lad's throat, sir! It's mangled worse than *hers*, sir. And''—Cardigan cleared his throat nervously—"and—well, the rookie *says*, sir, that the lad's hands were still moving although the lad himself was lying perfectly still. 'Tis a strange business, indeed, Doctor, and would you be having a look at this, sir?'"

He handed the doctor the newspaper he had been reading and pointed to a small item at the bottom of the page. It was a single paragraph and was dated the day before:

TURGOR, N. Y., August 11, 19—. A curious matter occurred here, today, where the old Turgot cemetery is being moved to make way for the new dam. One of the graves opened was that of Wladimir Tchianski, one of the greatest pianists of his day. His skeleton was found to be in perfect condition except for the bones of the hands. From the wrists down, the bones of both hands were missing and in their place was a peculiar green slime which emitted a powerful stench when the grave was opened. Local authorities think it the result of some little known disease and are attempting to analyze the green slime. So far their efforts have met with no success.