


# TERROR TALES



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 What foul and hideous power was it that drew the loveliest women from their beds in that pitiful transient camp—and made them surrender themselves to the unholy mercies of the monster that dwelt in the slime and ooze of the river-bed? Bill Coleman learned the answer; but the price he paid was dearer to him than life itself!

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# Hostesses In Hell

by RUSSELL GRAY

*If only the fury of that gale had sent us to the bottom of the sea! But a cruel fate spared us—to cast us on that island of the damned where I was forced to watch my lovely Carla and her friends become the playthings of creatures out of a devil's nightmare! . . .*



**A Novelette  
of Fantastic  
Horror**

## CHAPTER ONE

Not Human, Not Beast

**L**OOKING back, I cannot rid myself of the notion that a malignant power took over our destiny from the moment we stepped into the launch. To begin with, the plan had been only for Carla Mann and I to go on a short cruise. I had promised Carla's father that we would stick close to the shore,

as I had never before been on the ocean. Not that I'm a bad sailor; I'd had plenty of experience on inland waters. But Mr. Mann pointed out a lake isn't an ocean.

No, it isn't. But it wasn't the treacherous and ruthless sea that we had to worry about. What we found, finally, on dry land, was more cruel and horrible than the sea had ever been.

I was starting the motor when Carla's cousin, Melantha, and her two maiden aunts, whom everybody in Seabeach called Miss Desma and Miss Zelda appeared along the beach, and Carla asked them to come along. Less than a minute later the Foster twins, followed by Wanda Rimstad, charged on the dock and demanded to accompany us.



Seabeach was that sort of community. One happy family, and Carla Mann's boy friend, who had come from the city to spend a week with her, had been immediately accepted into that family. I, of course, was the boy friend. So by the time I eased the launch away from the dock, there were eight of us in the boat—seven women and myself and then we started our trip to hell. . . .

The weather was fine. The sea was rather choppy, but that seemed natural on the ocean and I didn't hug the shore as closely as I might have. But the shoreline was always there, less than a mile away.

We were out about an hour when the darkness swooped down on us. It came suddenly in the shape of an immense black-grey cloud. But there was no wind; instead there was a breathless calm. Even the waves flattened out. The shore melted away into a thin line.

"We had better go back," Carla said anxiously.

I nodded and turned the wheel. The nearer we reached shore, however, the further it seemed to be receding. The darkness was increasing. I could see lines of worry deepen on the face of Miss Desma who was sitting near the wheel.

"Everything's under control," I sang out cheerily. "We're nearly back. And suppose it does rain? The worse that some of us will get is a wetting. The rest of you can keep dry in the cabin."

I really believed that. I had been out in flimsier boats in storms.

But never in a storm like that. It swept at us from the ocean with the suddenness of a cavalry charge, and although it was only three in the afternoon, night came with it. With terror clutching at my heart, I realized that I could no longer see the shore.

"A compass!" I yelled above the wind. "There must be a compass in the cabin."

The girls went over every inch of the cabin a dozen times. They found no compass. All I could do was try to keep the launch from foundering until the storm blew over. And that wasn't an easy job. The waves were small mountains. The rain came down in solid sheets. Several times I had to cling desperately to the wheel to keep from being washed over. The women huddled in the tiny cabin.

And then something went wrong with

the motor. It simply died. I was never to find out what had really happened to it.

A few minutes later we had our first and only break. The storm eased off, petered out.

Did I say break? We would have been better off if we had all gone to the bottom of the ocean. The sea would have been kindlier. . . .

**T**HE clouds parted and the sun came through. It was, at the moment, the most welcome sight in the world. The rain continued for a short while longer, then melted away. I slumped down in my seat and groped in my pocket for cigarettes. The cigarettes were there all right, but they were a soggy mass. My drenched shirt and ducks were plastered to me and a good part of the ocean was in my sneakers.

The mainland was no longer in sight. With night only a couple of hours off and a useless motor, we would have been in a hell of a mess if not for the nearby island.

It had been the first thing I saw as soon as I could see anything. It lay about five hundred yards to starboard—a mile-long pile of vegetation, occasionally broken by enormous bare boulders. Not a very inviting place, but at least a haven.

The women came out of the cabin. They were a pretty disheveled lot. In spite of the fact that they had huddled in the cabin, each of them had been out in the storm long enough to have become drenched to the skin.

Carla threw her arms about me. With a wan smile she said: "Do you know, Jay, what I was thinking of when I was sure we were done for? That I wanted to kiss you once more before we went down."

So I kissed her then and there. The others grinned. Neither Carla nor I cared. I held her adorable wet body, clad only in shorts and a white polo shirt,

close to me. The soaked knitted shirt was glued to her, and the way the material moulded her high, rounded breasts did all sorts of things to my heart.

Reluctantly I released her, and it was at that time that I noticed how attractive all of the other women were. With the exception of the maiden aunts, they were all attired much like Carla. There was Carla's cousin, Melantha, buxom but not fat as the curves revealed by her clinging outfit testified. Wanda Rimstad, Carla's friend, was the dark-eyed, vivacious type. The Foster twins were always delightful to look at. About twenty years old, I imagine; small and fragile as porcelain dolls and indistinguishable from each other.

Even Carla's maiden aunts were easy on the eyes. Miss Zelda, who was about thirty-five, was the raw-boned, broad-shouldered type of woman, extremely well preserved. Miss Desma was a couple years older, plump, and with the most charming smile I had ever seen.

The evil destiny which had taken charge of us must have chuckled fiendishly at the sight of those seven attractive women.

I said: "Something's wrong with the motor. Maybe I can fix it. I suggest, though, that we get over to that island first and build a fire and dry out before we all catch pneumonia."

All eyes turned to the island, and instantly I sensed that something was wrong. Every one of the women had kept her courage admirably during the storm, but now I saw some of them shudder. The fact that they were wet and it was growing chilly, I thought; but I knew that wasn't it.

"That must be the island they told us to keep away from," Wanda Rimstad said in a faltering tone.

"Huh?" I demanded. "What's wrong with it?"

Carla's hand closed over my arm. "We

don't know. I've never seen it before. As far as we know it, it hasn't even a name. But there has been talk lately among the natives of Seabeach that there's a curse on the island, that there's something strange and horrible there."

Miss Zelda snorted derisively. "Stuff and nonsense! I've heard those stories, too—the usual prattle of superstitious folks who find pleasure in scaring themselves. I'm cold and I'd like nothing better than a warm fire."

"Right!" I agreed heartily. "I think I saw a couple of oars in the cabin."

The girls admitted reluctantly that their fears were silly. I fetched the oars. We had to use them as paddles. I took one side of the launch, the girls worked in shifts on the other side, and slowly we neared the island.

The vegetation came down to within a few feet of the water. And there was a man waiting to receive us!

I suppose we should have been glad to see him. His presence showed that the island was at least inhabited by human beings. But somehow the sight of him reacted on us in the opposite way.

**P**ERHAPS because of the way he looked. I'm quite tall, but he was as tall as I, and twice as broad. His head was massive, topped by an unkempt mane of shaggy reddish hair. He hadn't shaved in at least a week, and, aside from that, his face was something to scare a nervous man.

Yet it wasn't only his appearance. It wasn't even the pistol which was stuck conspicuously in his belt. It was the way he kept glancing over his shoulder every now and then toward the heart of the island and the fear which glistened in his eyes.

If a man his size and armed was afraid of something on that island, we certainly had reason to be uneasy.

As he helped me beach the launch, he said: "I saw your boat and I came to

meet you. I trust that I can be of service."

"You have a home on this island?" I asked.

"Yes. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Dr. Hallam Jarrett."

"An M. D.?" I couldn't keep the astonishment out of my voice.

He laughed. That is, laughter gushed from his throat, but there was no laugh in his face. "You do not think I look like a doctor? More like a circus strong man, perhaps? And my face, it hasn't enough refinement and sensitivity, eh? Too gross?"

Although he had read my thoughts correctly, I started to protest. He didn't bother to listen. By this time the women had all climbed out of the launch and stood huddled together, whispering among themselves. Dr. Jarrett looked at them.

I noticed for the first time how small and pig-like his eyes were. He said not a word but stood staring at the women as if he had never before seen any. I had an impression that his eyes were boring through their scanty, clinging garments—and he looked longest and most intently at Carla.

The women cringed, moved closer together under that scrutiny. Impulsively balling my fists, I stepped toward Dr. Jarrett. Then I stopped. I had gotten a closer look at his face, at his eyes, and what I saw there wasn't lust, but pity.

He was sorry for them, as if he had special knowledge of an appalling and inescapable doom in wait for them.

As briefly as possible, I made introductions. Dr. Jarrett nodded to each in turn and again offered the hospitality of his home.

Miss Zelda said: "Thank you, Dr. Jarrett, but we would prefer to return to Seabeach before dark if possible. Surely you must have a boat of some kind. We would be glad to pay."

The pity deepened in Dr. Jarrett's eyes. "Unfortunately our launch left a short time ago for supplies. It will not return until tomorrow. There is no other boat on the island."

It was then that we heard the scream for the first time.

Did I say scream? That's not the way to describe it. One associates a scream with terror or rage, and there was nothing of either in that cry. Rather it was an expression of sheer bestial triumph and exultation. Yet at the same time it was as thin and as high-pitched as the scream of an hysterical woman.

As suddenly as it had come the cry faded away. The blood had drained from all of our faces and intuitively the women had moved closer to me. Carla's wet shoulder shivered against my chest.

Dr. Jarrett's hand, I noticed, was closed over the butt of his pistol. His head was turned toward the center of the island.

Slowly his head moved toward us, and I saw beads of sweat on his forehead.

"My God," I cried, "there can't be animals on this island!"

"That wasn't an animal," Dr. Jarrett said quietly.

"A human being? It didn't sound like—"

"No," Dr. Jarrett said. "Not a human being either."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Woman Hell Sent

A FOOTPATH led through a jungle-like chaos of undergrowth. In single file, we followed Dr. Hallam Jarrett's huge bulk. I brought up the rear, walking with one hand on Carla's shoulder.

When we had walked for about five minutes, Carla stopped. "Jay, I'm afraid."

"Of Dr. Jarrett? I can handle him if necessary."

"Not only of him," she whispered. "It's something I feel deep inside of me, a sort of persistent warning. And those strange answers Dr. Jarrett gave to your questions about that weird scream."

I tried to dismiss her fears with a laugh. "His idea of humor. Or maybe he's a little cracked."

"But, Jay, he's afraid of something too."

That was true. Because I had no answer, I simply shrugged and said: "We've fallen behind the others. Let's hurry up to them."

The house stood in a large clearing at about the center of the island. When we broke out of the woods, we stopped and gaped. We had expected to find a shack, at the most a cabin. Instead we were looking at a structure more fit to be the manor house of an estate than on this wild island. It was a large Colonial-type house, freshly painted in dazzling white. Its symmetry was marred, however, by a long narrow building with barred windows which jutted from one wing.

"You are surprised at the magnificence in which we live?" Dr. Jarrett chuckled. "Yes, we have all modern conveniences, including electricity and running water." He paused and then added with a cryptic smile: "We cater only to the most exclusive clientele."

"You run a hotel here?" Miss Desma asked in surprise.

"You may call it that," Dr. Jarrett responded, and moved toward the house.

A man was standing on the open porch. In his hand he held a revolver with the longest barrel I had ever seen.

"That damn Cassie!" he called out excitedly. "Did you hear her, Hallam? She's driving them crazy."

He disregarded our party as if we didn't exist. He was even thinner than I and much shorter and he had the face of a ferret. Like Dr. Jarrett, he was unshaven.

"Stop worrying, Joseph," Dr. Jarrett told him. "She'll come back when she's hungry. Meanwhile we have guests. Tell Elsie to put on hot coffee for them."

Joseph looked at us for the first time. Slowly his eyes swept over each of the women, seemingly appraising them as if they were so much merchandise, and he ran a white tongue over his lips. Then he thrust his revolver into his belt and went into the house.

By this time the women were in a pretty bad state of mind. Carla hung on to me as if she would never let go, and one of the twins, Rose or Marie, I couldn't tell which, clung to my other arm.

"What's all the mystery about, Doctor?" I demanded. "Who is this Cassie and whom is she driving crazy and why? What are you afraid of? Why are you and the other man carrying guns?"

Dr. Jarrett expelled a vast sigh. "Cassie is one of our patients. She ran into the woods and won't return. You see, we run a sanitarium"—he hesitated—"for incurables."

That explanation was reasonable—or so it seemed to us at the time. We followed Dr. Jarrett into the house.

A FIRE crackled merrily in the fieldstone fireplace of the cozily furnished living room. The fire drew us the way flies are drawn to honey. We took turns warming and drying ourselves until a woman came in with sandwiches and steaming coffee.

Elsie, Dr. Jarrett called the woman. She was built like a wrestler and had a face like a granite block.

We ate ravenously while Dr. Jarrett sat deep in an armchair with his stubbled chin resting on vast, redhaired fists. The food and the fire served to put us more at our ease.

When we had finished eating, Dr. Jarrett said: "I regret that there are no clothes for the ladies to change into. I suggest that they remove their clothes and dry them in front of the fire."

"Here?" Miss Zelda inquired with raised eyebrows.

"Oh, no. There is a private room. Elsie, show the ladies to the study."

Dutifully the women trooped after Elsie. The desire to get their clothes off and dry them was greater than any uneasiness which they still felt.

I followed, telling them: "I'll go back to the launch and see if I can fix the motor. Chances are that we can still get back to Seabeach by nightfall."

We went along the hallway. Elsie opened a door into a room tastily furnished in red leather. Against one wall was a fireplace. The women made for it and I discreetly withdrew.

Dr. Jarrett was no longer in the living room when I went through it. As I walked across the clearing to the footpath, I heard a groan behind me. I turned. It had come from the narrow structure which jutted out from the house. There was nothing strange about a groan in a sanitarium, but

again I was assailed by the feeling that something was terribly wrong.

I realized now that Dr. Jarrett's brief explanation had left a great deal untold. Why the pistols? Why the iron bars on what was evidently the hospital section? And why were there no nurses in the sanitarium? Aside from the inmates and whomever had gone for supplies, Dr. Jarrett and Joseph and Elsie appeared to be the only permanent residents on the island.

As I hurried along the footpath, the conviction grew that I had to get the women away from the island as soon as possible. But when I reached the launch and looked at the motor, my heart died within me. Somebody had used a sledge hammer or a large rock on the motor. It would never again be any good.

Who had done this? Who wanted to make sure that we would stay here overnight?

As I was climbing out of the launch, I heard a woman's terrified scream. It lasted only a second or two, then choked off abruptly.

I stood frozen, listening—then I was running. I visualized those seven attractive women grouped nude about the fire. Had it been one of them who had screamed? Perhaps Carla? God!

I was stumbling through the footpath when I heard the second cry. Not a scream of terror this time, but a cry of triumph and exultation, as of a beast over its kill.

Good God, what was happening at the house?

It seemed that I had been running for ages, although it couldn't have been more than a couple of minutes. Suddenly a woman materialized on the path in front of me. I had to pull myself up short to keep from crashing into her.

How can I describe her? I can say that she was beautiful and it wouldn't mean anything. It was the kind of beauty that dazzled you like the most brilliant display of fireworks bursting suddenly in the night



sky. It enveloped you and left you dazed and unbelieving. Does that sound absurd? Well, remember that I had heard somebody scream in mortal terror and that I was worried sick for the safety of the girl I loved and was rushing to her—yet at the sight of this woman I forgot all that. I made no attempt to go past her and continue to the house. I simply stood there drinking in her beauty.

**H**ER figure was statuesque and perfectly proportioned. Her eyes were as green as the surrounding shrubbery, eyes which caught the waning sunlight and reflected it like a cat's. Her teeth were white and small and even and curiously pointed. And her dress was utterly ridiculous on that island.

Not because it did not become her, but because it was as out of place on that wild island as an aborigine in loincloth would have been on Fifth Avenue, New York. She wore, you see, a green and silver evening gown and silver opera pumps. And she wore nothing else. That was easy to see, because her gown was made of gossamer stuff through which the sheen of her flesh could be glimpsed. The bodice was cut so low that only the lower curves of her magnificent breasts were covered.

Her voice was husky, vibrant. She asked with the guilelessness of a child: "You love Cassie?" And she stepped toward me.

Cassie! The patient who Dr. Jarrett had said had run away.

She came so close to me that her breasts pressed against my chest. I'm a shade over six-two, but she wasn't more than a couple of inches shorter. Carla had been wiped from my mind. My lips moved toward hers.

Her hands came up to hold me to her—And I saw her fingers. With a cry I hurled myself backward. Her fingers were wet up to the knuckles—red with glistening blood which was still wet.

A cloud passed over her perfect features. "You do not love Cassie?"

I kept staring at her fingers as if hypnotized by them, and suddenly it struck me that she was the one I had heard cry out twice in that spine-chilling manner of a triumphant beast! She was the one Dr. Jarrett had said was not an animal and not human! And this creature had almost caused me to forget Carla!

She saw the rage which suddenly contorted my face. Her pointed teeth bared in an animal snarl—and all at once she was gone. I saw only the green of her gown merge into the green of the undergrowth, and then I was alone on the path. I did not stop to wonder how she could possibly have made her way through that solid mass of vegetation. I was running again, my mind shrieking Carla's name.

The moment I burst into the clearing I saw the body in front of the porch. And on the porch itself, I saw Carla struggling in the arms of Dr. Jarrett.

I flew up to the porch, swung Dr. Jarrett around by a shoulder, and drove a hard right to his jaw. He went back on his heels, righted himself, yelled: "Don't be a fool! I was trying to keep her from running into danger."

He could have pulled his gun and shot me had he wanted to. He didn't, so I thought perhaps he was on the level. Carla cried, "Jay, darling!" and threw herself into my arms.

"There's death out there," Dr. Jarrett was saying. "This girl went crazy with fear, like some of the others. I had to hold her back. That woman there on the ground let panic get her, and now look at her."

I looked. I went down the porch steps and stood over the body. My stomach twisted.

It was—or rather had been—Miss Zelda. She lay on her back, arms outflung, eyes staring with horror. She hadn't any throat. It had been ripped out as

if by steel fingers. By the fingers of an incredibly beautiful woman which were red up to the knuckles with Miss Zelda's blood.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Block of Cells

JOSEPH came out of the house. I could see the pallor of his face through his unshaven beard.

"My God, Cassie's let them all out!" he said to Dr. Jarrett. "They're running wild on the island."

Dr. Jarrett nodded. "She stole the key from my desk. Look for her, Joseph. If you can bring her back, the others will come."

Joseph looked like a man who had been asked to volunteer for a task which meant inevitable death. He said: "Why pick on me? You're responsible for this hellish place. It's your lookout to get them back."

Dr. Jarrett dropped his hand languidly on his pistol and took a step or two toward Joseph. From where I stood his bulk completely blotted out Joseph. I don't know if anything was said by either and I couldn't see their faces. But after about half a minute of silence, Joseph growled, "Oh, all right," and he moved toward the woods. His narrow shoulders were hunched and he walked like a man going to his doom.

Carla was sobbing softly against my chest. We were still standing near Miss Zelda's corpse, but we made sure not to let our eyes stray toward it.

"Look here, Dr. Jarrett," I demanded. "What the devil is going on here? One of our party has been brutally murdered and the rest of us are in danger. We have a right to know what it's all about."

Dr. Jarrett turned his massive, ugly face toward us. All the sorrow in the world seemed to lie in his small, blood-shot eyes.

"Yes, you have a right to know," he agreed. "But first I should like to ask the young lady what caused the panic among the women."

Carla said: "We had taken our clothes off and spread them in front of the fireplace to dry. As we were standing about, we heard strange sounds come from the wing of the house. It seemed like human voices uttering sounds which might have been words, although I can't be sure. And some seemed to be animal growls. Aunt Desma tried to reassure us, but her words didn't do much good. Two or three of us started to put on our damp clothes. Then the door opened and I, at least, screamed. We thought it was you, Dr. Jarrett, or your man Joseph. It was a man, all right, but such a man as we had never seen. It was a human monster."

She stopped talking and clung closer to me.

"Yes?" Dr. Jarrett prompted.

Carla lifted her head from my chest. "He was the most horrible creature I had ever seen. He seemed to be all shoulders, wider even than yours, Dr. Jarrett, and hardly anything else. His head seemed hardly bigger than my fist and his legs were the size of a child's, dragging uselessly behind him. He moved by pushing himself along on powerful arms. His eyes were pinpoints, and saliva drooled from the slit that must have been his mouth.

"Do you wonder that we went crazy with panic? One of the Foster twins, Rose, I think, shrieked wildly and, stark naked as she was, plunged past the monster and out through the door. Most of us were simply frozen with sheer horror and couldn't move or utter a word. Aunt Zelda, who had already dressed, was the only one of us who maintained self-control. She ran after Rose to stop her. Strangely enough, the monster made no attempt to go near any of us. He crouched there on the floor looking at us as we

huddled against the wall. We didn't dare move.

"IT MUST have been less than a minute, but it seemed like a century, when we heard Aunt Zelda scream. Then we heard that other cry, that terrible cry we'd heard at the launch and the monster's pinhead jerked up, listening. Suddenly he scurried out through the door. Then hysteria overwhelmed us. I paused to put on my clothes. So did some of the other girls, while at least one, Wanda Rimstad, simply ran. What happened to the others I don't know. In our panic we went in all different directions. I found myself in front of the house, and there was Aunt Zelda's body. I think I went mad with fear. I started running. That was when you caught me, Dr. Jarrett. I'm sorry I fought you. I realize now that you were only trying to keep me from running into the woods."

"She fought like a wildcat," Dr. Jarrett told me. "I had the time of my life dragging her as far as the porch. Then you came. It would have been fatal for her to go into the woods. One girl, I'm afraid, is there now."

My eyes moved toward the brooding trees and vegetation. Twilight was descending on the island and a cool breeze knifed through my wet clothes. I found that my teeth were chattering, but it wasn't from coldness.

I said: "Where are the other women? You said only one went into the woods."

"They're safe in the house," Dr. Jarrett stated. "Joseph and Elsie managed to round them up and—ah—calm them. They're safe. But that unfortunate girl in the woods!"

Moving toward the doctor with Carla still in my arms, I grasped his shoulder. "We'll have to go after Rose Foster, you and I together, and you'll have to give me a gun. But before that you'll have to tell me what it's all about."

"Yes," Dr. Jarrett said. "Come with me into the house. We must make sure that the other girls are all right."

We followed him. I'd have to leave Carla with the others. I hated to let her out of my sight, but it was more important that Rose Foster be rescued from whatever horror faced her on the island.

He led us into a windowless corridor which was only dimly lit. It was in the narrow wing. I stopped abruptly and removed my arm from about Carla's waist, ready to hurl myself at Dr. Jarrett.

For the corridor was lined on one side with prison cells!

"What does this mean, Dr. Jarrett?"

The big man turned slowly. He had his gun in his hand.

"Don't misunderstand," he pleaded with me. "I'm doing this only because I know you'll be safe nowhere else."

A sharp cry tore from Carla's throat. Not because of Dr. Jarrett's gun. She wasn't even looking at him. Her eyes were fixed on the barred door of the first cell.

Wanda Rimstad was in there. She hadn't a stitch of clothing on her and she was futilely trying to cover her nudity with her hands.

"Jay!" she moaned, coming to the door. "What's going to happen to us?"

I whirled toward Dr. Jarrett. He snapped: "By God, I'll shoot if I have to. Don't you realize that I'm doing this for your sake. It's the only place you and the women will be safe until we manage to round up the—ah—escaped inmates. And I'm warning you, as I warned the others, not to make an outcry, because if the creatures know you're in here, they'll come out of the woods and pull you out of the cells, and then—well, it won't be pleasant."

What could I do? If I went for Dr. Jarrett he would shoot me down, and that wouldn't help Carla or any of the other girls. So we continued down the

corridor. This time Dr. Jarrett walked behind us with levelled gun.

**E**ACH cell we passed contained a member of our party. Miss Desma stood at the barred door and told us in a choked voice not to lose heart. Little Marie Foster was sprawled on a cot sobbing hysterically over the unknown fate of her twin sister. Melantha, clad only in shorts, strode up and down her cell like a caged animal.

The next cell was empty. Dr. Jarrett pointed his gun at me. "It will be only for a couple of hours," he assured me. "Perhaps less. Believe me, this is the best way."

I hesitated. Carla was whimpering deep in her throat and holding on to me as if she would never let go.

"Why can't we be in one cell?" I asked.

Dr. Jarrett shook his head. "It will be the way I say. You have five seconds to go into the cell."

Gently I unwound Carla's arms from about me, kissed her on the lips, then stepped into the cell. The door clanged shut.

"Jay!" Carla wailed. There were the sounds of a slight scuffle, then the door of the cell next to mine opened and closed.

Dr. Jarrett, standing somewhere in the corridor, raised his voice so that all of us could hear. "Remember, no outcry. I'm giving you this warning for your own sakes. If your presence here is found out by—by the former inmates, I am not responsible for the consequences."

There was the sound of heavy footsteps receding down the corridor, and after that silence.

Silence broken by the toneless weeping of Marie Foster, by Melantha's bare feet padding endlessly on the stone floor of the cell on my left, by Carla moaning with subdued hysteria on my right.

I inspected my cell. It was about twelve

feet by twelve and furnished with a cot, a chair, a dresser and washstand. More comfortable than the average furnished room—yet there was the barred door and the barred window.

These cells were the living quarters of the inmates.

But why barred cells for them? Well, I had already had an inkling of the answer, the full horror of which I could not, at that time, even guess at. Cells for the monster which Carla had described, for the beautiful woman I had met on the path who was a bestial killer—for others!

I strode to the window. Twilight was deepening. A great orange moon rode above the line of trees. The window looked directly out into the clearing which was deserted. There was an ominous stillness out there, a brooding hush as if the whole world were holding its breath before the coming of doom.

Then a scream keened out from beyond the trees. It was such an expression of unbearable terror that every drop of blood felt as if it were drained out of my body. The voice, of course, was unrecognizable, but I had no doubt it was Rose Foster. She was the only one of our party, besides Miss Zelda, who was dead, who was not in one of the cells.

The screams came nearer. Bushes parted and Rose plunged into the clearing.

She was stark naked. Numberless streaks of blood covering her delicate white body testified that she must have been crashing wildly through the underbrush.

At the sight of the house her screams ceased. Hope flitted over her face and she started sprinting wildly toward the porch.

She never reached it.

The woods on three sides of the house suddenly became alive with creatures who could have come only out of a nightmare.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Nightmare Creatures

MY HANDS gripped the iron bars of the window with such intensity that my knuckles turned white. The creatures which were closing in on Rose Foster could not be human, and yet the most monstrous of them had some of the physical characteristics of normal men and women. And that was the most horrible of all. If each of them had been all monster the sight would have been less terrifying than their hideous perversions of mankind.

There were about a dozen of them, some male, some female, some both or neither. There was the creature Carla had described, with the tremendous shoulders and withered torso who dragged himself over the ground with powerful arms. There was something like a snake, wriggling along the ground, yet with the face of a handsome boy. There was a huge hairy male shuffling like a great ape with a single eye and apparently no nose. There was—

But why go on? Even now the vision of that hellish crew makes me retch with nausea.

They converged on Rose Foster, cutting her off from the house. She was screaming again, not loud; the screams were thin as the edge of a razor and utterly hopeless. Then I could no longer hear her, although her mouth remained open to the last. Other sounds drowned out her terror: the hungry, lustful animal growls of the monsters, and the shrieks of the women in the cells on either side of me.

We had forgotten Dr. Jarrett's warning to keep still lest the monsters learn of our presence in the cell block. Each of us was at our window and each of us had gone temporarily mad, and we could express our madness only through our

throats. Fortunately the monsters were too intent upon their immediate victim to pay any attention to us.

I think that I shall never forget that picture of Rose Foster standing within that closing circle of horror, her fragile lovely body trembling like a fawn at bay, her delicate features contorted with insane terror. Then they were on her. The one-eyed creature swept her up and tossed her into the air. Another monster caught her and . . .

Well, have you ever seen malicious children playing with a sawdust doll which they were bent on destroying? They would toss it about to each other, by an arm, by a leg, by the head, until the sawdust ran out and there was nothing left but a limp rag still bearing some of the features of the doll? That was what happened to little Rose Foster.

I shook and pounded at the bars until my hands were sore and bleeding. At last I turned away. The animal howls went on and on and the women in the cells kept shrieking.

And then, above all that din, I heard a woman laugh.

I forced myself to look again through the barred window. The creature named Cassie was standing just inside the clearing, tall and magnificent in her transparent evening gown, and her gorgeous face was twisted with maniacal laughter.

The monsters were still playing with Rose Foster, but now she resembled less a human being than they themselves. An inert bundle covered with broken red skin. Dead at last, I thought numbly, and I was glad. She, at least, was out of it. For us the horror had only begun.

A gun bellowed. A slug-like monster leaped a foot in the air. The gun spoke again and the thing went down.

Cassie stopped laughing. Her head jerked toward the house. The gun continued to roar, four more times, and a creature that looked like a giant crab died.

**T**HERE was a sudden silence. We in the cells had stopped screaming. The growls of the monsters had died away. They stamped and writhed about uneasily, stared dully at the bodies of the two who had been killed, and then with one accord looked toward Cassie.

"Come," she ordered and disappeared among the trees.

The monsters followed. The shots started again, and one more creature died before they all succeeded in leaving the clearing.

For a long time I simply stood holding myself up by clutching the bars and staring out into the clearing. Four bodies lay there, three of the monsters and what was left of Rose Foster.

An hysterical voice called: "Jay! Oh, God, Jay, I'll go mad! They'll come for us next!"

It was Carla. I went to the cell door. The other women in the cells started raving, their voices shrill with hysteria.

I said, loud enough for all of them to hear: "It's all right now, we're safe. It was Dr. Jarrett and his man who shot. Guns can hold the monsters off all night. Tomorrow the launch will come with supplies and we'll get off this cursed place safely."

My words calmed them to some extent. But I was considerably less optimistic than I pretended. I didn't trust Dr. Jarrett; I wasn't satisfied with his explanation for having locked us in the cells. There was nothing for us to do but hope.

I kept up a chatter of optimism to the others. Suddenly I stopped talking as a door nearby opened and closed. The sound came from my right, away from the house. There must be a back door leading directly into the cell block from outside.

Feet moved along the corridor. And then Carla emitted a low cry and a woman laughed.

That laugh! I had heard it a short time

ago in the clearing. I don't think that I will ever forget it. But, even as I heard it, I knew what I must do.

I whispered: "Cassie! You are looking for me. Here I am."

She appeared in front of my cell. Even in that uncertain light her beauty was startling. Its only effect on me now was one of murderous rage which I had difficulty suppressing. But I forced a smile on my lips; I forced ardor into my voice. I spoke to her slowly, patiently, as to a child.

"Cassie, you are so beautiful. I love you, Cassie."

She smiled as gratefully as a child who has been given a new toy. She arched her body, ran her hands sensuously over her almost bared breasts.

"You love Cassie?" she muttered happily.

No sound from the other women in the cells. I knew that all of them must be listening intently, and I was certain that they were aware of what my scheme was.

"Cassie, I want to hold you in my arms," I went on. "I want to kiss you, love you."

"Yes," she said. "That would be nice."

In her hand was a large key. I said: "Come in here, Cassie, so that I can love you."

She frowned. "No. I don't like it in there."

"All right, Cassie, I'll come out to you. We'll go in the woods together and I'll love you."

She nodded. "Yes. Cassie will like that."

"But I can't get out. They locked me in."

"Cassie will get you out." She inserted the key in the lock.

**I** PUSHED the door open. She came into my arms, her eager smile baring her sharp teeth. My right fist swept up almost from the floor to her chin. It was

a perfect knockout. Her statuesque body crumpled against the corridor wall.

The key, as I had surmised, fitted all the cells. In less than a minute I had all the doors open. Marie Foster lay unconscious in the floor of her cell. Small wonder, for she had seen the horrible way in which her twin sister had died. I lifted her in my arms and with the others crowding at my heels we went to the main section of the house. Night was complete, but bright moonlight flooded into the house.

I led the girls to the room where they had been drying their clothes when the first of the monsters had appeared. Wanda Rimstad and Melantha Mann, who had fled without their clothes, hurriedly dressed.

Miss Desma said: "What can we do now? We can't possibly leave the island and I doubt if the house will afford much protection."

"The important thing is not to let panic get you again," I replied. "That would be fatal. You girls stay here. Don't put a light on and under no circumstances make a sound. Is there a key in this door? . . . Good. Lock the door after me and don't open it for anybody but me. I'm going through the house to see if I can find a weapon. After that I'll have a talk with Dr. Jarrett."

The first floor of the house was deserted. I found matches on a table, noiselessly went through the rooms, opening every drawer. No weapon of any kind. I made my way up to the second floor. The first door I came to opened into a bedroom. And seated on a chair at a window was the woman Elsie. She hadn't put a light on, but the full moon filled the room with its mellow glow.

She turned her head slightly. "Come in," she said.

On the window sill lay a revolver. Near it was a box of .38 cartridges.

"So you were the one who killed the

monsters, who drove them away," I said.

Her hard, expressionless face belied the intense emotion in her voice. "I was too late to save the poor girl. I had to search for a gun, and by the time I found it she was dead."

The window afforded a complete view of the clearing.

Five dark bodies lay in the moonlight—Miss Zelda and Rose Foster and the three monsters.

"Where did the monsters come from?" I asked. "Why are they on this island?"

"Several years ago Dr. Jarrett lost his doctor's license. I don't know why. He established what he calls this sanitarium—really a prison for human monsters. They are the freakish offsprings of wealthy people who can pay large sums to have the creatures hidden from the world. The ordinary institutions wouldn't suffice. There is always the danger of a leak, of an epidemic or a fire or a nosey reporter exposing to the world the parentage of the monsters. So they pay Dr. Jarrett well for hiding them on this island."

"I assumed it was something like that," I said. "And this evening they escaped."

"Yes. Somehow I, or Joseph, failed to lock Cassie's cell properly. She escaped, got back to the house, stole a key and released the other monsters. She can do anything she wants with them. They regard her as a kind of goddess."

"Why is she here?" I asked. "She belongs in a madhouse."

**I**F POSSIBLE, Elsie's eyes grew even harder than they had been. "She's not like the others—physically. You've heard people say that a woman is as beautiful as sin. Cassie is evil incarnate. She's not mad; it's something far worse. She has no soul. And she is more dangerous than any of the others because she has some intelligence." She paused; then added in a low tone: "Her affection for you is the

first time she showed any emotion aside from sheer bestiality."

"You know about that?"

"Yes," Elsie said. "From this window I could hear everything that was said at the cells. I thought of releasing all of you, but you would be no better off elsewhere on the island. I heard you tricking Cassie into opening the door of your cell. I heard you enter the room directly below this where the girls now are."

No sound came from the room below. They were obeying my admonition to maintain absolute silence. "Why are *you* here?" I asked.

"I am Joseph's wife," she replied simply.

There was nothing I could say. For a moment I stood silent.

I asked: "Where are Dr. Jarrett and Joseph? What are they up to?"

"I don't know," Elsie replied. "They went into the woods to try to bring Cassie back. The other monsters would be more easily controlled if she were caught. Perhaps they are dead."

They were alive and unharmed as we saw at that moment. Dr. Jarrett and Joseph stepped into the clearing. They walked like men who were afraid of their shadows and their pistols were gripped in their hands. They stopped walking and stared at the bodies in the clearing. Then, whispering to each other, they came toward the house. They paused beneath our window, not ten feet away from the window of the room in which the girls huddled in the darkness. Elsie and I were hardly breathing as we listened.

"I tell you, Doc, that's the only way," Joseph was saying. "Otherwise we haven't got a chance. When they saw me in the woods they were going to tear me apart. My gun wouldn't have been any good against all of them. Lucky for me, this naked girl came running along chased by one of 'em. They forgot about me and they all went after her."

Dr. Jarrett nodded his massive head.

"And they caught her here." He pointed toward the bloody remains of Rose Foster. "That's what they did to her. The shots must have come from Elsie. She killed three of them and the rest were scared off."

"But they won't stay scared off," Joseph whispered in a voice husky with fear. "They know the girls are here. Maybe we can kill them all when they charge the house, but chances are enough will stay alive to get us."

Dr. Jarrett looked a long time toward the narrow wing. "You're right," he said at last. "If we were to kill them, it would mean the end of this lucrative—ah—business. We would certainly not be paid for keeping monsters who are dead. Yes, we have no choice but to keep them satisfied by giving the women to them. We can lure them back to the cells by using some of the women as bait—it's the same technique as a hunter uses a live kid to lure flesh-eating animals into a trap."

It took a while for the meaning of Dr. Jarrett's words to penetrate my brain. His scheme was too diabolical and heartless to have been proposed by a human being. Near me Elsie was breathing heavily. I could not tell how the idea affected her.

The whispering below went on. My horror-numbed brain hardly heard Joseph explain that later they could bury our bodies and that our friends and relatives would believe that we had been lost in the storm.

A moan seemed to rise from the floor. It was followed by a shrill scream in the room below.

Poor girls! They had been forced to listen to Dr. Jarrett and Joseph discussing the horrible fate that was in store for them, and finally they had been able to maintain the agonizing silence no longer. In the room below there was a bedlam of hysteria.



## CHAPTER FIVE

## Raid of the Monsters

I SNATCHED the revolver out of Elsie's hand and poked my head and right arm through the open window. Dr. Jarrett and Joseph had started running around to the porch steps as soon as they had realized that the girls were in that room. I had a chance for two shots before they disappeared into the house. I was trembling with mingled horror and rage. The shots went wild.

I made for the door of the bedroom. "I'll kill them!" I sobbed. "They're worse than the monsters!"

"Wait!" Elsie yelled. "That's not the way. We're all doomed if we start fighting among ourselves."

I paid no attention to her. At the head of the stairs I stopped, staring down into the broad electric-lit foyer below. Every room on the first floor, including the wing, opened into the foyer. Dr. Jarrett and Joseph were charging in from the large front room. One of the girls had unlocked the door of the room in which I had left them and in their frenzy they were pouring out into the foyer.

At the sight of Dr. Jarrett and Joseph the girls stopped dead, paralyzed with terror. They simply crouched before the open door, whimpering, moaning.

Miss Desma was shrilling crazily: "You can't turn us over to the monsters! You're men, not fiends! Oh, God, please don't!"

Dr. Jarrett's ugly face was set into a twisted mask from which he had excluded all pity. Joseph said between his teeth: "Get back into the room, all of you, or I'll start shooting."

I was halfway down the stairs when I shot at Joseph. He spun in a half turn, cursed harshly and swung his revolver toward me. The bellowing of both our guns filled the house. I kept thumbing the hammer back and pulling the trigger several times after the gun was empty.

"Jay! Oh, God, Jay!" I heard Carla's voice. Behind me Elsie was crying: "Stop it, you fools! We all share the same danger!"

I was rather surprised to find that I hadn't been hit. Joseph lay motionless in the foyer. And I saw Dr. Jarrett bringing up his gun slowly. His tiny blood-shot eyes bulged; his upper lip was drawn back over his teeth.

My legs wobbled under me. My own revolver was empty. Dr. Jarrett would kill me and then he would hand the women over to the monsters.

He didn't shoot. I saw his gun swing away from me, saw the terror that leaped into his eyes before I realized what the hellish cries meant which had suddenly become an overtone to the screams of the women. The animal howls grew louder, were all around the house. Feet pounded on the porch and in the corridor of the wing. The monsters were coming from both sides!

"Jay!"

Carla's anguished voice separated itself from the din, became a thing apart. I flew down the stairs moaning her name. If I had had another bullet in my gun, I would have put it into her heart. It would be an easier, a cleaner way to die.

I WAS at the bottom step when the first of the monsters plunged into the foyer. Dr. Jarrett snapped a quick shot at the creature and it stopped abruptly. It had come in on all four limbs. Its browless eyes, the size of saucers, glazed and it swayed. A second monster charged in, knocking the dying creature flat on its face. As I sprang toward Carla, I saw a third one scurrying in from the corridor door. Dr. Jarrett's gun kept barking.

I could think of nothing but to get to Carla. "Jay!" I heard again and her dear face leaped up before me. One hand touched her arm, the other started to slide around her shoulder—then some-

thing like a battering ram knocked me away.

I twisted, lashing out wildly, desperately. My fist sank into flabby flesh. "Carla!" I sobbed and kept fighting. I didn't know what I was fighting, a mist clouded my eyes; but I kept swinging with the frenzy of one who knows that he is doomed. The mingled screams and howls were terrific. Monstrous bodies pressed around me. Every drive of my fists struck flesh. But it was hopeless. There was no end to the on-passing bodies. My arms turned to lead. I felt myself slammed against the wall and my legs gave way.

Tremendous arms picked me up, hurled me down. I had a sensation of falling for a long time—falling, falling. . . .

My first thought when I recovered consciousness was that I was on a boat which was rocking violently. I grinned. I had fallen asleep on the motor launch, I told myself, and now it was storming. The island and Dr. Jarrett and the monsters had all been a bad dream. I would open my eyes and Carla would be nearby.

I opened my eyes. A vacuum formed inside of me. I was in the big living room of Dr. Jarrett's house. And I was looking up into the beautiful face of the she-monster, Cassie.

She was carrying me. She placed me gently down on a couch and then she slid her six-foot length up on the couch beside me. She writhed against me, purring like a contented cat.

I lay motionless. The house was quiet, but far off I heard a rumble of sound, the distant collective voice of the monsters and of those of the girls who were still left alive.

Cassie had no doubt saved my life. After she had recovered consciousness in the corridor she must have slipped into the woods and rounded up the other monsters and led them in the raid on the house. Forgetting the blow I had struck her or holding no enmity against me, she

must have saved me from death and had remained here with me while the other monsters had taken the girls into the woods.

I felt no gratitude toward her. Carla was dead by now or would soon be. I would have preferred not to have recovered. In spite of her superb beauty, the touch of her scantily clad body against mine made my skin crawl. She was the creature who had ripped Miss Zelda's throat out. She was a soulless, merciless beast. And the fact that she evidently loved me filled me only with horror.

I brought my hands up under her. She smiled and moaned with pleasure as my hands inadvertently brushed over her breasts. My fingers caressed her smooth throat—then tightened. . . .

**H**ER green eyes opened wide with surprise. For moments she did not understand, and then she was fighting for her life. I heaved upward and we rolled off the couch, myself on top. She was remarkably strong. She writhed under me, kicking up with her legs, clawing my face to ribbons with sharp fingernails.

Relentlessly I hung on. Warm blood rushed down my torn face, but I felt no pain. Little by little her resistance weakened. Presently she lay still. For a minute or two more my fingers clung about her throat. Then groggily I stood up and looked down at her motionless form.

A pang of regret gripped my heart. She looked all woman as she lay there dead, the acme of feminine beauty. And in her insane, monster fashion she had loved me. . . . Then I recalled the thing that she had been and I could not be sorry that I had rid the world of her.

Dr. Jarrett's big body lay in the open doorway to the foyer. His massive head lay at a queer angle from his shoulders. His neck had been broken. Nearby lay two monsters whom he had shot before

the others had reached him. Between them was the body of Joseph whom I had killed. And at the bottom of the stairway was a mutilated pulp—all that was left of Elsie.

I stood surveying this charnel scene without emotion. I think that by that time I was incapable of emotion. In a kind of detached way, as if I were following out orders, I set about looking for the revolver I had dropped during the fight with the monsters. When I found it, I went up the stairs to the bedroom where I had spoken to Elsie. The box of cartridges was still on the windowsill. I loaded the revolver and poured the rest of the cartridges into my pants pocket.

Through the open window I saw the full moon, now turned white, sailing high in the sky. And then, directly overhead, a motor roared, and from behind the house an airplane swooped.

Breathlessly I watched it disappear. I waited there at the window. It did not return. The drone of the motor had drowned out my shouts, had drowned out the other cries. I knew that the hydroplane was looking for us. When the launch had not returned after the storm, a wide hunt, which must be going on this minute, had been instituted.

I recalled having seen a five gallon can of kerosene in the kitchen pantry while searching for a weapon. I found the can, snatched up a handful of matches, and methodically I set to work. In a few minutes I had started fires in half a dozen parts of the house. I opened every window wide. A strong wind was blowing. In spite of the storm that afternoon, a month of dry weather had made the vegetation into excellent tinder. The fire would sweep the island.

It might serve as a signal for the searching parties, but it was too late for that now. Primarily, the fire would be a deadly instrument of vengeance, for nothing would escape its withering blast.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Purging Fire

WHEN I reached the edge of the clearing, I glanced back at the house. The interior seemed ablaze with lights, and as I watched, a tongue of flame shot out of a window and licked the siding.

I didn't bother looking for a path. Plunging into the underbrush, I kept going in the direction from which the cries were coming. Thorns ripped my clothes, slashed my skin.

A girl's insane voice keened out in front of me. Carla's voice? Impossible to tell, but it might be, and hope gushed back.

Suddenly the vegetation ended and I found myself on the shore. A girl was running into the sea, the water already up to her hips—and two monsters were pursuing her. From the squat scaly body of one something like a tentacle snaked out. The girl threw herself face forward in the water and vanished. Then the monster also went under the water.

I was about to snap a shot at the second monster when the first came up with the girl's struggling body in its tentacles. I couldn't shoot now for fear of hitting the girl. I was running and was now knee-deep in water. The second monster saw me, shrieked thinly, and flew at me. Its movement took it out of line with the girl and I squeezed the trigger of the gun. The creature's voice was cut off abruptly and the rod-like body fell forward with a splash.

The other monster wasn't more than five feet away now. The girl's nearly nude, squirming body was held in front of its hideous form. Cursing, I tried to step around for a shot. The monster lifted the girl high over its head and hurled her at me. I hadn't time to step aside. The girl's torso struck me squarely in the chest and I stumbled backward for a couple of steps and went down.

A face contorted with unbearable horror was inches from my own. It was Melantha Mann, Carla's cousin.

"Jay!" she moaned. "Thank heaven you came."

Save for wisps of torn shorts which hung on her only by a miracle, her clothes had been ripped off her.

"Where are the others?" I asked. "Carla?"

"I don't know," she wailed. "Pray God that they are already dead. I tried to drown myself, but they wouldn't let me. They wanted to . . ." She started to shudder violently.

The monster had fled. I inspected my revolver. Fortunately I had fallen on dry land and the gun was unharmed. I was no longer thinking of vengeance. Melantha was still alive, so perhaps it was not yet too late to save Carla and the others. I could still hear what sounded like screaming.

I said: "Walk along the shore until you come to the launch. Get in it and wait."

Melantha jumped to her feet and clutched at my arm. "Don't leave me alone! Please!"

"I'm going after the rest of the monsters. They might get you again."

"I'll go with you," she insisted wildly. "You have a gun. If worst comes to worst, you can kill me."

Without a word I started along the shore. She scampered after me, a crazy whimper trickling from her lips. The wind was reaching gale proportions. Grimly I told myself that nature which had brought us to this hell, was now on the side of vengeance. Above the trees we could see the leaping flames of the burning house. In almost no time the entire island would be ablaze.

**T**HE screams were bursting against our eardrums now. I felt the slowness of our progress would drive me mad. And

then, when finally we burst upon the nightmare scene, I was certain that I had indeed gone mad. For in spite of the horrors I had experienced on that island, I could not convince myself that what my eyes saw could conceivably be real.

We stood on the edge of an enormous flat rock. On the rock itself were the monsters and the girls. Not two hundred feet away the woods were on fire, and the roaring of the oncoming flames and the yellow flickering fire made the scene look truly like a part of hell.

I have described how the monsters had tossed Rose Foster about the way malicious children toss a sawdust doll.

Well, it was something like that now, only worse.

Miss Desma, her clothes ripped from her, one of her legs broken, was trying frantically to crawl away from two monsters who pranced and giggled on either side of her and kept jabbing pointed branches into her delicate flesh. A thing like a giant slug which used all four limbs like hands was tearing Marie Foster apart as I have seen boys do to a fly. She was dead, I saw, and her blood spattered the thing's body. Wanda Rimstad was in the center of a circle of monsters who were pelting her with stones. She crouched, her head buried in her arms, her bruised body quivering, a hollow, endless scream quivering from her throat, yet making no attempt to avoid the missiles. And Carla—

She was at the further end of the rock—in the arms of the huge ape-like creature with a single eye. He was the most nearly human, the most definitely male of them all, and so her fate would be even more horrible than that of the others. He had ripped her clothes from her, and as I watched he crushed her quivering lovely body against his hairy chest.

It wasn't, I think, more than a few seconds before I started moving forward with my revolver belching death. I was

remarkably calm, as if I had lost the ability to feel violent emotion.

The monsters came at me. Some never reached me. Then my gun was empty and I was fighting, squirming, retreating back into the woods. I sank under a bush, reloaded, then emerged again on the rock, shooting. The monsters had enough intelligence to fear my deadly weapon. They fled.

The creature who had Carla was the last to flee, but when he saw me going for him, he turned with a bellow of fear and plunged in the direction of the fire. I could have shot him in the back, but I was afraid that the slug might go through his body and strike Carla. As I raced after him, I could hear Carla shrieking my name.

The fire turned him back toward me. He tried to cut off at an angle, but the fire was closing in on three sides. Through the undergrowth I saw him hesitate at the very edge of the blaze and glance back at me. The heat was terrific. With a bellow of rage he dropped Carla and charged at me. I waited until he was almost on me before I shot. I had to put three slugs into him before he was dead.

When I reached Carla, we clung to each other as if we wanted to fuse our bodies. I lifted her in my arms and carried her back to the rock. The women were huddled together. Marie was dead. Miss Desma had a broken leg and bled from a

score of wounds. Wanda Rimstad had hardly the strength to get to her feet. I placed Carla on her feet, swung Miss Desma over one shoulder, and with Carla and Melantha supporting Wanda on either side we started to make our way toward the water.

That trip was like a bad dream. We sensed rather than saw the monsters who still remained alive lurking all around us, following us. Now and then we heard the grunts and mewlings above the roar of the fire or of a heavy body moving through the underbrush. If they all charged us at once, they would overwhelm me. When we reached the water, we breathed more easily. We went along the narrow beach until at long last we came to the launch. Carla and Melantha helped me push it off the shore and then I paddled it a couple of hundred feet out. After that we just sat, watching the fire.

After an hour or so the fire reached the shore and I had to paddle out further to avoid the heat. Once we heard a howl of agony rise in the heart of the fire which made us turn pale. Another time we saw something, which at that distance looked very much like a man, leap into the water and swim. For a long time it kept on swimming and finally disappeared.

By morning nothing would be left alive on the island. That was for the best. Fire, the great purifier. . . .

THE END