

# TERROR TALES



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NUMBER THREE

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

All stories in magazines bearing this seal are written especially for this publisher and have never before been printed in any form!

## A SPINE-CHILLING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL

- Bride of the Serpent**.....Francis James 11  
 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!

## THREE NOVELETTES OF STARK TERROR

- Hostesses in Hell**.....Russell Gray 34  
 We thanked God for sparing us, when the storm cast us ashore on that little, uncharted isle; but soon we were praying and begging that death might come quickly, as we watched that half-human, degenerate pack make bloody sport with the girls of our shipwrecked party.
- House of the Mummy Men**.....Edith and Ejler Jacobson 64  
 The mad genius that burned like a searing flame in the twisted brain of Dr. Timothy Howard would allow him no rest until his great plan was completed—until the anguished screams of his reluctant young assistants should be moulded in a pageant of pain that would force an unfriendly world to admit his greatness!
- Lilith—Deep Lady of Death**.....Arthur Leo Zagat 88  
 It was a ghastly power from the pits of hell itself that sent panic like wildfire through the stolid workers in the big Tunnel, that transformed its murky interior into a shambles of blood and horror—and left a man and a girl alone to face the awful might of Lilith, the Devil's Sister!

## TWO SHORT STORIES OF EERIE MYSTERY

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 Doomed I was by my mother's infidelity to live in solitude and continence, and woe to the man who dared my kiss. But I could not help my beauty, nor could I deny the flame of love that burned high within me!
- Murder Puppet**.....Gabriel Wilson 81  
 All his life Myron Collins had slaved to create Brutus, the puppet master of evil—and he endowed this thing of wood and sawdust with a dreadful life of its own; a life that was the concentrate of destruction and unholy desire!

—AND—

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# Interlude of Terror

ORDINARILY Fran Jones was a lovely, radiant creature. Her red-gold hair had a way of stealing the lights from her sparkling black eyes; her smile was warm and frank like a child's, which was why she was so valuable to the Agent. No courtesan of the Eighteenth Century possessed as much allure in her whole being as Fran did in any one sweet curve of her young body. The Agent noticed that, too, the day he saw her model the Palm Beach line at Mademoiselle Fechet's exclusive salon. It wasn't long after that, that she went to work for him . . . .

Ah, yes, she was lovely—once. But not any more. Had you seen Fran this night, huddling in the lee of a ramshackle freight shed to escape the bitter February blasts, you never could have recognized her as the girl who had so delightfully exhibited the creations of Mlle. Fechet . . . nor as the sweet, wholesome young lady who conducted "talent contests" in rural motion picture houses. For now Fran was ridden by a relentless, inescapable fear—a terror that had been haunting her for three weeks.

The Agent was following Fran; the Agent would follow to the ends of the earth. He would never stop searching for her until his long, wiry fingers had closed about her neck. Why couldn't the police catch him? Why couldn't some one terminate the swathe of mad, unprecedented murders perpetuated by this blood-crazy killer? Fran did not know. All she knew was that he was never far behind her in her tortuous, almost heedless flight . . . and that soon, inexorably, he would find her . . . .

Something stirred in the coal bin nearby. Her heart quailed; her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth. Had the Agent tracked her down at last? Had he ridden into this tiny, night-shrouded hamlet on the train that had just slid slowly by? She turned to flee into the darkness, God only knew where. Then she heard the sound again. It was only coal, tumbling from the top of the pile because of the vibration the train had made.

But to Fran, it might as well have been Death itself. Almost, she would have welcomed it, rather than undergo the further torture of a mind keyed to terror's highest pitch . . . !

Her eyes became a little more accustomed to the darkness. Nearby she could make out a freight loading platform, with something piled upon it. Cautiously she moved toward it, covering more distance than she had dared move since alighting from the filthy day coach fifteen minutes ago.

That pile was empty burlap bags. She seized an armful, crawled with them way under the platform. It was dry there, and near the foundation of the little station there was no wind. She made a nest and curled up, drawing the remaining bags around her. From under her coat she took half a loaf of bread she had been saving for two days, munched on it, sobbing and trembling.

Then she saw the eyes; lambent, glowing coals peering out of the pitch-black night. Chill worse than the winter cold oozed down her spine. She gasped out: "Here! Here I am, Tony. Put your fingers on my throat—and press. Press 'til I'm dead . . . ."

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Then she held her breath, waiting.  
Nothing happened.

When she couldn't stand it any longer, she looked up. There was an animal, silhouetted against the dim grey of a snowdrift beside the tracks. The relief that flooded over her was akin to pain. It was a stray cat. She called it, softly, and it came. It disdained to share the stiff, stale bread, but it nestled close to Fran's breast, purring. And the heat of its little body was the only comfort Fran had known for three weeks.

The cat made her think of her sister's kitten. Ellie always kept kittens in the apartment until . . . that night. Ellie was dead, now. Tony had killed her. Tony had hacked her to bits, left her a gruesome travesty of human flesh. Fran would never forget the awful hideousness of it . . . the heavy odor of blood that permeated the bedroom. Only Fran knew that Tony had meant to murder *her*—instead of Ellie. So she had fled.

There was no one to whom she could turn—not even the police. The fact that she was innocent would have made no difference. "How could a smart girl like you be tangled up with the Agent for months, and not know his racket?" the cops would say. "How could you lure young girls away from their back-woods homes, turn them over to the Agent—without realizing what you were doing? Do you think we're fools?"

Oh, she knew now, all right—too late. She shuddered to think of the girls she had unknowingly sold into white slavery . . . The Agent had capitalized on her very innocence. A few weeks modelling clothes in the city hadn't taught Fran much. She was as "country" as the girls she had duped. Up to a certain point, the Agent had been exceedingly wily in his deception of Fran . . . He had seen her that day in Mlle. Fechet's, where he had gone to buy a thousand-dollar wrap for his current fancy. He had spotted Fran, and he had gained an introduction to her. Anthony Wendell—Theatrical Agent . . . that was the inscription on his chaste card. How could Fran have known that the man was *the* Agent, king of an international white slave ring? *No one else knew it!*

Later, he made her a "talent scout," at a handsome salary. She conducted screen tests and the beauty contests among small-town aspirants to Broadway and Hollywood. Of those who won, a few actually became actresses. The Agent kept up a front. The majority were pressed into different occupation . . . some as far away as South America. But the Agent conducted his business with such decorum that Fran, one of his chief scouts, suspected nothing.

Everything was all right until Tony Wendell fell in love with Fran. At least, for a while Fran thought it was love. So adroit was he that she failed to see an ulterior motive when he installed her in a gorgeous apartment, with a French maid. So innocent was she, that she immediately brought her kid-sister from home, and got her a job at Mlle. Fechet's. Somehow the Agent concealed his anger—at first.

One night Fran was awakened—horribly. She came "home" to find Tony there, a spell of madness upon him, standing over something

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## INTERLUDE OF TERROR

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Fran had fled from one cheap, out-of-the-way rooming house to another, only to learn from the newspapers that Wendell was believed to be headed for that vicinity. And always, he was. Kindly landladies testified to that—mutely, in ghastly circumstances. For one after another, they were found butchered, while in nearly every case were found words of blood, smeared nearby: *You harbored her!*

The newspapers emblazoned the story across the continent: *Mad killer Wendell seeking mystery woman . . .* Until Fran dared not appear at the door of any rooming house or hotel. Her fear-crazed face marked her as the Mystery Woman, everywhere she went. Her money was gone; she dared not communicate with anyone. She stole food from refuse barrels, slept in junkyards, old warehouses. And she knew that Tony, Agent of Murder, would get her . . .

Another freight train rumbled by. Fran stirred, shivering, hugging the stray cat closer. Was that a footstep? Had someone dropped off that train? A pall of terror froze her in rigid wakefulness until the snow by the tracks turned lighter. She had to scurry forth in search of food, before sunrise.

Lamely she worked her way from beneath the platform, wishing that the one person who had helped her, could help her now: Joe, chauffeur for Tony Wendell. She remembered that Tony had called Joe the Wheel sometimes. She thought it was funny, then. Now she knew it was an underworld name. Still, he had saved her life. The Wheel . . .

She stepped around the corner of the coal bin, toward the road to town. Her eye caught the motion of a shadow detaching itself from deeper gloom. She stopped, stockstill—and screamed. Long, steely fingers dug into her throat.

The voice of the Agent said, "You little fool! Didn't you know my organization stretches across the country? That you could escape just so long?" The pressure relaxed.

Fran gasped, "I haven't talked, Tony. Honest to God! You don't have to kill me—"

"Of course you haven't. I'm not worrying about that!" His face was the image of evil . . . insane. "Don't you see? Desire for you started this murder chain. I've got to have you—and kill you. Then I'll be cured. Then I can go on as the Agent, king of the rackets!"

The man was stark, raving mad. Once more his fingers closed around Fran's throat, and now his obscene mouth hovered over hers, panting horribly. One hand slid around her body; then he was dragging her beneath the platform. She fought futilely, visions of Ellie and the little French maid flashing through her tormented mind. Consciousness began to fade, and from a great distance she heard a dull thud. After that, the pressure slackened.

Presently she felt hands chafing her neck, heard a voice saying, "Come, now, Miss Fran, don't tell me I've trailed the crazy son all this ways and croaked him for nothing. Don't let the one good thing I ever done in my life come to nothing . . ." She opened her eyes, and saw Joe . . .

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Fran did not at first recognize. Then nausea swept through her. The thing on the floor was the little French maid, dead, cut to ribbons. Tony's eyes were staring wildly; saliva leaked from his slobbering lips. His dinner clothes were daubed with blood, and in one hand he clutched the butt of a shattered glass vase to which shreds of flesh still adhered. Even as Fran opened her mouth to scream, she fainted.

When she came to, Tony Wendell was holding her tenderly. He was crying like a baby, telling her he loved her, and that he wouldn't hurt her . . . that he was sick . . . He would go to a sanatorium, and by and by he would come back cured. But he couldn't go to jail. He'd die, there; he'd never be cured. And Fran, in a daze, helped him dispose of the body. Her great, pure heart believed . . . sympathized. She thought she loved Tony Wendell. She couldn't know that he had murdered the maid in a fit of maniacal frustration, for having been denied Fran so long.

The next night, just before she was to have accompanied Tony to a hospital, his chauffeur came to her.

"Miss Fran," he said, his eyes showing terror, "you gotta leave."

"Why, Joe, where's Mr. Wendell?" she asked. "He was going—"

Joe said, "The boss is going all right, but not to no hospital. This last spell he had has got him down. He sez he told you too much—he must of."

"Told me too much?" Fran was bewildered. Was Tony sorry he had told her he loved her? She couldn't ask Joe *that*. She didn't have to.

"Miss Fran," said Joe, "Listen to the Wheel—I'm gonna tell you. The Agent is goin' on a murder jag like he does every few years. An' you're gonna be next! Now beat it!"

"Agent? . . . *Murder jag?*" This was beyond Fran's comprehension.

"You're too good a dame, Miss Fran. Even I could tell that. So I'm givin' you a break . . ."

He told Fran about the Agent . . . and about his periodic murder mania which had been becoming worse and worse. "I'm gonna whip you down to the station and see you outa town," he finished, and before Fran recovered from a state of numb shock, she was halfway across the city. Then she remembered Ellie, and her heart chilled.

She called to Joe to drive her back, which he did; but he didn't dare go too near the apartment building. He was afraid the Agent would be there.

Fran went in alone—and Tony had been there. She found Ellie, slaughtered in the hall, her coat still on. Apparently Tony had entered first, waited by the door. He had struck before he knew his victim wasn't Fran. Fearing detection, he had fled. But something told Fran that he would catch her. So she fled, too.

Through the apartment's management, the police had attached the murder to Tony Wendell. And Tony, skillfully dodging the authorities, was in pursuit of the person he feared would give him away.