


TERROR TALES



VOLUME TEN MARCH-APRIL, 1939 NUMBER THREE

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A SPINE-CHILLING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL

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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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Lilith-Deep

Something more hellish than a "blow" drove those hard-hitting "sandhogs" from the Big Bore in frenzied terror. . . . Something Chief Engineer Jerry Carter, whose first love was that great tunnel project, couldn't crush—without the help of a fragile girl who braved the awful pressure under the river . . . and the whip in the hands of Satan's Sister!



CHAPTER ONE

Lilith, Lady of Death

THE gauge in the wall of the air-lock showed the "50 lbs" that matched the pressure inside the tunnel. Dan Ryan, night super of the Big Bore, started for the inner gate. His hand

lifted to the wheel that would unlock it, but the wheel whirled before he could touch it. The door burst open, and Ryan was swept back by a rush of white-faced, gibbering sandhogs.

A giant Negro, eyes rolling with a frenzy of terror, kneeled a whimpering

Lady of Death

by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT



Hell's Chief Engineer never designed a torture chamber to equal the pit of doom one man made of New York's newest tunnel—in this high-pitched terror novelette by Mr. Zagat!

Hunky out of his way. An Irish pipe-layer crashed a path for himself with mad fists. A Magyar riveter made a battering-ram of his oilskin-clothed shoulder, and Ryan was banged up against the lock's

opposite wall, his wind knocked out.

The gate from the Tube was pulled shut by frantic hands. A hiss signalled that someone had started the slow half-hour of decompression necessary before

anyone could leave for the normal pressure of the outer world without being tortured by the dreaded "bends." The great steel box was hideous with a clamor of wordless shouts, frightened whimperings and shrill invocations to the Deity.

"Pipe down," Ryan howled, getting his breath. "Pipe down you mugs," and re-inforced the order with blistering oaths. "What is it? What's sent you yellowbellies skyhootin' in here like scutterin' rats?"

They goggled at him as if he spoke an alien tongue. "Is it a break?" Ryan demanded, and knew at once that it could not be any sudden inrush of river silt that had sent into the lock this tidal wave of frightened men. He'd worked with them too long, knew their breed too well, to really think that any of the usual forms which danger takes in the under-river workings could so grey their lips and dilate their pupils, and set the small muscles twitching in their mud-masked faces.

If the Tube's iron walls were buckling, if some "blow" in the Bore's metal armor had reduced pressure and let river mud and water come in upon them, they would be in there battling it with a fine coordination of brawn and muscle and brain. They were tunnel-men, hard-headed, hard-bodied, hard-living and hard-dying. Never, as long as there was any hope of staving off disaster would they run. If all hope were gone, they would try to escape, but it was incredible that, even then, they should flee in this manner, their faces glistening with the cold sweat of fear.

They gaped at Ryan, soundless gasps in their throats, and Ryan's own skin crawled with the contagion of the nameless terror he read in their eyes.

"You, Jon," he growled, his horny fingers hooking into the collar of Jon Wencslaw's leather coat, wet and mud-slimed. "What's gone wrong? Speak up, damn you!" Ryan shook the burly Pole with a viciousness born of wrath at his

own reasonless panic, shook some modicum of sense back into the crew foreman's pallid visage, shook a gurgle of speech out of him.

"Ees in dere, da Devil's Virgin," came the amazing words. "She ees take Dinny Mara, an da rest of us run before she take us all."

An icy pucker tightened the skin across the back of Dan Ryan's shoulders. The tale of the Devil's Virgin is whispered wherever human moles burrow through towering mountains, or under city streets, or beneath the turgid flood of mighty rivers. More beautiful than a hundred poets can tell, she is, and more evil than Satan, her brother, by the same measure that a bad woman is worse than the worst of men. Seeing her face, no man can resist her. Nor can any man live, having seen her, and the manner in which he dies is such as would make the Grand Inquisitor himself ill with pity. So dreadful a being is the Devil's Virgin that He who permits Lucifer to roam the earth has forbidden her its surface, and that is why she is known only to the men who delve into the Plutonian realms.

RECALLING this legend, a shudder ran through Dan Ryan's great frame, and his lips blanched. Then those same lips were snarling. "You're crazy, Jon Wencslaw. You're blithering mad."

"He ain't crazy, Mistah Ryan," Black Jeff interposed. "She is in dah." Jeff could tie a crowbar into a knot with his bare hands, and there was none born of woman whom Jeff Adams feared. "She sho is." But now his face was a sickly green, his eyes big as saucers, and his teeth chattered audibly. "We seen her come right froo de Headin' Shield, an' we run. But Dinny, he look back at her, an' he turned aroun' an' went to her. He wuz de on'y one dat seen her full—"

"What you saw was the grey spray of a blow, you blithering idiots," Dan Ryan

broke in. "And Dinny was the only one with guts enough to try to plug the leak before the whole river fills the tunnel. You left him to fight it alone—Lift that pressure, you white-livered rats. Lift it back to fifty so's we can get back in and help him."

The gauge was already down to forty-four, and it must go back up to fifty, or when the lock gate was opened, the consequent lessening of the push of air against the weight of the river might be just enough to let the shield blow in, and the silt of the river bottom after it, and the river itself, and months of labor would be obliterated. Months of labor and the life of a black-haired, ox-shouldered Irish boy with a never fading grin and the fighting heart of Brian Boru.

"Lift the pressure," Dan Ryan bawled again.

A beetle-browed Slovak reached for the switch handle to obey him, but the Slovak's hand was batted away.

"No," a voice from the back of the lock shouted. "We're not opening the gate. We're not letting *her* get at us."

"Lift the pressure," Ryan bellowed, and then he was charging through the press of fear-crazed sandhogs, shoe and knee and iron fists crunching on bodies, battering them out of his way.

He reached the switch, sliced it over. He jerked its handle-lever out of its socket and was laying about him with the flashing, murderous hammer of brass. It cleared a space about him and held that space clear while the gauge-needle that had been dropping, quivered and started to climb again. To forty-six it climbed, and to forty-seven, while the great bulk of Dan Ryan guarded the switch, his massive head thrust forward on that bull's neck of his, his black eyes slitted and furious. To forty-eight and forty-nine the needle climbed, and to fifty, and then Ryan was moving to the inner gate of the lock, flinging it open.

Dan Ryan lurched out of the lock into the tunnel, roaring, "Come on you yellow scuts." He didn't wait to see if they followed him, but heaved into a run.

A clanging crash reverberated behind him. Ryan looked back over his shoulder and gave voice to an oath that would have seared his tongue were it not made of asbestos, for that clang had been the sound of the lock-gate closing, and he was alone in the great Tube. He flung the switch handle at the great metal plate with a snarling, "Here, you gutless pups!" and ran on toward the head of the Bore.

The Big Tube through which he ran was weird as some minor hell, a huge, iron-walled pipe alive with grotesque shadows and with the throbbing pulse of the air-pumps that held the river out of it.

The pressure of fifty pounds to the square inch squeezed the water out of the air, so that the Tunnel was filled with a thick, steamy fog, stifling the light of the naked electric bulbs hanging overhead. The water dripped from the wet-black, arced ceiling, and dribbled down the curved iron walls. The water lay in glistening pools between the rails on which stood trains of little dumpcars loaded with mud and silt from the Shield that was the cutting head of the Tube which nosed day and night, night and day, out under the river, four feet each twenty-four hours.

Ryan's great chest labored with the breathing of the thick air, and despite the damp chill, sweat bathed his brow and his back and chest as he ran. The thump of his running boots echoed hollow and resonant in the tunnel, and the pulse of the pumps throbbed against his ears, and about him tiny leaks in the airlines hissed like a million snakes, yet a strange, weird hush seemed to possess the Tunnel.

It was not only that the clangor of steel on steel was missing, and the deafening chatter of the riveting guns, the scrape of shovels and the rumbling of the dump car trains and all the other noises that had

resounded here, for so many months. There seemed to be another silence here, underlying the silence of sounds missing, a curious, taut hush as if the Tunnel itself bated breath with dread of something that had come into it, something alien and evil.

Icy fingers closed on Dan Ryan's heart as he ran on, the shadows about him sluggish, his legs sluggish as though ploughing through some invisible, miasmatic fluid. He seemed to have run endless miles, but it seemed still endless miles to the Head of the Tube where Dinny Mara was fighting alone to plug some blow in the Shield.

THEN Dan Ryan went past a pile of cement bags and saw the Shield, the great circular steel wall divided into compartments where the men who covered in the lock, far back, should be working. The Shield was netted by a maze of rubber tubes and lead pipes, but it was whole, no sign of a break in it, or of a blow.

In the muck and mire of the Tunnel's floor beneath the Shield, Ryan saw the tools the men had dropped in their panic, and there he saw Dinny Mara.

It must be Dinny Mara, but there was nothing about the torn and awful thing that slopped in a pool of rusted, stinking water like a caught fish, that could prove it to have been Dinny. Faceless it was, its flesh shredded, its limbs crushed so that they seemed never to have been centred by bones. That which enabled it to lift and splash down and lift again, grotesquely, was not life at all, but some awful animation of a dead thing that even Death rejected.

Ryan froze for a horrible moment, staring at it, and most horrible of all that moment was a word that croaked from the gory, featureless mask. A name. "*Lilith.*"

There was neither agony in the sound of the name, nor a curse, but a strange, inexplicable yearning. And then that from

which it came dropped down with a rusty splash, and was still.

Dan Ryan went to his knee beside the horror that once had been Dinny Mara, and he saw that Dinny was dead. Ryan's hand lifted to cross himself, his grey lips forming to the first word of a prayer for a soul that had passed. But Ryan's hand never made the sign of the cross, nor did a syllable of prayer pass his numbed lips.

His eyes, lifting to the Father, had found a green shimmer all about him, as if the Tunnel were filled, abruptly, with the green brine of the sea. Through it the cast-iron wall of the Bore and the steel loom of the Shield wavered blurrily.

Ryan's breath caught in his throat, for fear that, if he inhaled, it would be water he would draw into his lungs, and almost he felt the cold caress of the water against his skin.

And then there was a silvery glint in the green, and the languid undulation of a great fish's scaly tail. It trailed great streamers of seaweed black as night, and through the weaving black masses gleamed the whiteness of the fish's belly—No!

Not of a fish's belly! That pallid gleam in the wavering, watery light had the shape of a human abdomen, and half-hidden by a streaming mantle of black hair, Dan Ryan saw the pearly sheen of a woman's breasts, full-rounded and virginal. The swan-curve of a woman's neck formed out of the green light, and above it was a woman's face.

Framed in a cascade of raven locks, a mouth damask-red and sensuous smiled at Dan Ryan, a smile secret and enticing. From under a high, white forehead lustrous, dark eyes promised him such delights as words never have been devised to describe.

Arms of whitest alabaster lifted, throwing back the ebon curtain of hair and unveiling all the wonder of her. The arms stretched out to Dan Ryan, calling him to their embrace.

Dan Ryan rose, heart hammering his chest, blood in his veins hot with desire, all the world blotted from his mind, only passion alive within him. He started to the woman, her voluptuous smile welcoming him. Something caught his ankle, tangling it. He glanced down—saw that it was a boneless leg that had caught him, *the crushed leg of Dinny Mara!*

An oath ripped from Ryan's white lips. Then he leaped for the woman-fish, his hands clenched into fists, the fists flailing at her.

A white flash of light met him, blinding. Dan Ryan screamed, the sound of it high and shrill and agonized. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Virgin's Lash

THE embrasure of the window was deep enough for Diane Forbes and Jerry Carter to stand within it and be cut off by the curtains behind them from the chatter of the crowded room. Carter's arm was around the slim, warm body of his sweetheart, and the fragrance of her tawny locks was in his nostrils and his heart beat strong with his love for her.

"It's good to be alone with you," Diane murmured, the tiny oval of her face a glimmer in the dimness.

The smile on Carter's big-boned face was a little bitter. "So you say. But you insist on dragging me to a brawl like this, where we've got to sneak off to be alone, the first night in a week that I've been able to get away from the Tunnel. You make me dress up like a monkey in a circus." His stalwart shoulders wriggled uneasily within the black stricture of his tuxedo. "And choke myself with a starched collar, to show me off to a bunch of nincompoops who never did an honest day's work in their lives."

"You're a big boob, Jerry." On her petal-like lips the epithet was an endearment. "Darling, it's these nincompoops

who are responsible for the tunnels and bridges you design, and—"

"The devil it is," Carter growled. "Maybe they finance them, but it's the huskies who build them, the bohunks like Jon Wencslaw, and the two-fisted, devil-be-damned micks like Dan Ryan and Dinny Mara. Look!" He drew her closer to the window, so that she could look out into the night, out and down from this sixteenth story aerie to where the river was a wide, black ribbon moiréed with gold, far below. "See, down there where that spangle of lights is clustered, that's where the Tunnel is being built, not in this perfumed penthouse with its powdered beldames and its paunched, pouch-eyed captains of high finance. I wouldn't give the little finger of one of my sandhogs for the whole mess of tycoons and vapid, glass-eyed playboys you chase around with."

Against his sturdy young bulk, Diane was a fairy sprite in silver and gauze, a nymph spun from the stuff of dreams; the downy bloom of a peach on her soft cheek and her hazel eyes aglow with pride in the brawn and brains of her man. "Oh, there's something to be said for them, Jerry. Most of them have fought hard for what they have—"

"How have they fought? With stocks and bonds and ticker tape, cheating and swindling one another, the best liar and biggest thief the winner. And when they've won, they go soft. There's a man down there, where those red sparks show on a black bulk, over near the other shore just north of where the line of the Tunnel runs. Elkan Pond. He invented a dozen of the devices out of which your tycoons made their fortunes. He's an old man now, past eighty, but is he prancing around in a white shirt, and black tails? No. He's down on the bed of the river every day, in a new sort of diving machine he's devised, doing the thing that every small boy dreams of, hunting for buried treasure. A bullion-carrying frigate

was sunk somewhere out there, during the Revolution, and he's searching for it. He won't find it, of course, but look at the fun he's having—"

"Fun!" Diane interrupted. "I think he's pitiful. I know about him. He never married, never had a woman to love, a child to cherish. He's had nothing, all his life, except his inventions and his—" A discreet cough, just outside the curtains, cut her off. And then they were apart, turning to a grey-faced man in the livery of a butler.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carter," the latter said. "But there is a telephone message for you, relayed from Miss Forbes' home. It seems that there is some trouble at the Tunnel, sir, and your presence is required."

"The devil!" Carter exclaimed. "I wonder what—" He wheeled back to the window, peered out. "It's not a blow, I don't see any bubbles coming up. But Dan Ryan wouldn't call me if it wasn't serious. Sorry, chicken, I'll have to go."

"I'm going with you," Diane exclaimed, and then she was running to keep pace with Jerry's long-legged strides, running through a swirl of tail-coated men and their jewel-bedizened, pillow-bosomed mates.

A TAXI roared into the flood-lighted yard at the Shafthead of the Tunnel, braked to a screeching stop. Its door slammed open and Jerry Carter leaped from it, his black tie askew, his blond hair ruffled. "Wait here," he snapped at Diane, flung a bill at the hackman and pounded through a row of ambulances toward a cluster of blue-uniformed policemen who stood somehow dazedly around the door to the building where the elevator platform of the airlock entrance to the Big Bore came to the surface.

One of the cops grabbed him. "Where d'you think you're goin', guy?" the officer grunted.

"In there!" Carter growled. "I've got to—"

"The hell you are. There's trouble enough without any sightseers—"

"Sightseer, hell," Carter barked. "I'm the chief engineer, here. What's gone wrong, man?"

"I dunno—"

Carter broke the fellow's grip, lunged away from him and into the Shaft House. There were more cops here, and a number of white-suited hospital internes. The latter were bending over a row of men who writhed on the floor, blood streaming from their mouths and noses and eye-sockets, their muscles jerking spasmodically.

"The bends!" Jerry exclaimed. "What on earth—" He saw a pump-tender, grabbed him. "Fogarty," he yelled. "What's coming off here?"

Bill Fogarty stared at him with horror-stricken eyes. "God knows, Chief. The whole damn night shift got caught in the lock when the pressure went off. Less than a minute's decompression they had, instead of a half-hour, and—"

"The pressure went? How did that happen?"

"Main-line valve to the lock went out, and I can't see how. I—"

"The Tunnel!" Was the Bore filled with water? "How—"

"Tunnel pressure is all right." Fogarty jabbed a shaking finger at the largest of a bank of gauges on a near wall. "Steady at fifty."

"Then what the devil were the boys doing in the lock? They weren't due out till—"

Carter cut off as brutal fingers dug into his shoulder. He twisted to a gorilla-jawed man with the gold-braided cap of a police captain. "You're Carter, in charge here, ain't you?" the latter demanded.

"I'm the chief engineer in charge of construction. Yes."

"Then you're under arrest. For crim-

inal negligence. But it will be manslaughter if any of these lugs die. They—” Jerry jerked from his hold, dropped to a twitching, gore-masked giant at his feet.

“Chief,” had croaked from the bloody mouth. “Chief.” It would have taken more than a grip on his shoulder to hold Carter from him.

“Yes, Jeff,” he murmured. “What?”

“Dan Ryan’s still in de Bore,” the tortured Negro moaned. “An’—an’ some-thin’ terrible’s happened to him. We—he hollered we was yaller, an’ some on us fought ’twill we got de gate open to go after him. We heard him scream an’—whoof—dey wasn’t no mo’ pressure an’ de gate slam’ shut on us, an’—” A gush of blood from his writhing mouth drowned the rest.

The captain dragged Carter to his feet by his arm. “You’re under arrest,” he repeated. “For criminal—”

“Negligence,” Jerry grunted. “You said that before.” And then he was yelling to an interne. “Doc. You got to get these boys into the medical lock and send the pressure up to fifty again, force the nitrogen back into their blood. There’s one out in the yard—”

“Yeah, buddy,” the young medico interrupted. “We know. We got a half-dozen of them in there now, and that’s all it will hold.” Over his shoulder Jerry saw the elevator platform come up through the floor. Cops on it had a half-dozen more sandhogs flung over their shoulders.

“This is the last,” one of the cops yelled.

“And the rest of the boys will have to take their chance,” the interne finished. “If their hearts are strong enough we may pull them through—”

“*May* isn’t good enough,” Carter snarled, and twisted to the captain. “Listen,” he grated. “We’ve got to get the big lock working again so we can put the men back in. I’m going down—”

“The hell you are,” the officer grunted. “Our emergency crew will work on the lock, but you’re going to a nice, quiet cell, mister.”

“All right,” Carter responded, his tone ominously low and even. “All right. But there’s something else to be attended to. There’s a man still in the tunnel. You’ve got to send some one in there to get him out.”

“We’ll do that when we get the lock fixed. I’m not going to send any of my men in there to—” Carter’s fist crashed the rest of the sentence back between the officer’s teeth. Then Jerry had jerked free, was leaping past the elevator shaft-head. A square, black hole gaped in the floor here. As Carter jumped for this, feet first, he heard a cop yell, “The man’s a maniac—grab him! He’s crazy!”

His legs, his hands, caught the side-pieces of the vertical ladder that went down into the darkness, two hundred and fifty feet to the level of the Big Bore, an emergency exit against failure of the elevator.

HE HAD no intention of letting Dan Ryan, who had screamed in agony, wait till fumbling police mechanics had found the flaw in the lock pump-line and adjusted it.

Down the ladder Jerry Carter slid, friction burning his hands, fraying the black broadcloth of his dress trousers. Down he went into a stygian darkness, into damp, dripping chill, while above him shouts broke out and faded. And then he dropped into light again, the light of the space into which the lock opened.

The impact jarred Carter away from the ladder, flung him down into trampled, noisome muck. The last trace of dapper-ness was gone when he staggered to his feet again, his tuxedo, his once-white shirt-bosom dripping mud, his starched collar a muddy, limp rag about his neck.

The outer gate of the airlock gaped

open. Carter leaped through it, slammed the portal shut. With hasty but sure fingers he pulled down the iron dogs that would hold it shut against anything short of an oxy-acetylene torch. The meddling cops would play hell reaching the lock.

He wanted only enough time to get into the Tunnel and find Dan Ryan. The fault in the air line couldn't be located and repaired before he'd be back, and so he wasn't harming the sandhogs any. When he brought Dan out he'd let the cops take him away. Meantime they couldn't get at him.

There *was* a way by which the cops could by-pass the big lock, a smaller, emergency lock, with a battery-operated pump of its own. Carter grinned humorlessly, thinking how little apt any tunnelman would be to tell them of this, and went across to the other gate.

The switch-handle was gone. That didn't matter. It wouldn't be any use anyway. But Carter's heart sank as he sighted the gauge beside it, the needle against the pin at zero. He'd had no time to think of that, no time to realize that with the pumps inoperative he could not get out into the Tunnel.

The air-pressure in here was normal, sixteen pounds to the square inch, and that in the Tunnel fifty. The difference, thirty-four pounds, lay against every square inch of the inner gate, holding it shut. The gate measured six feet by three. Its area was more than two and a half thousand square inches, and so to open it Carter must move a weight of over forty tons!

His hands threw out sidewise, in a gesture of despair.

He spun around to go back, to open the outer gate and take the chance that the police would listen to him, that they would let him go through the emergency lock and bring Dan Ryan out. A small chance it was, when they thought he was insane, but it was the only—

He stumbled over something, went down to his knees. It was an electric drill, dropped here by some sandhog who'd clung to it till the out-gush of air had caught him. Carter snatched it up, jumped erect. He reached overhead to the single bulb that illuminated the interior of the lock.

The glass burned his fingers, but he gritted his teeth and twisted it. Darkness, velvet and impenetrable, closed in. Carter finished unscrewing the bulb, replaced it with the plug attached to the long feed-wire of the drill. Then he groped back to the inner gate, set the drill's bit against the steel, and thumbed the trigger-switch that set the drill whining.

THE bit bored into the steel, and its whine bored into Jerry Carter's brain, and its breast plate vibrated against his chest, while the thick blackness thumbed his eyes. Then there was a sharp hiss above the whine of the drill, hiss of air forcing in past the bit, and he pulled the bit out of the hole he had made.

The hiss rose to a scream as air under fifty pounds pressure squeezed into the lock through that small hole. The blackness became something tangible now, something weighty and alive. It squeezed Jerry Carter's chest. It bound his brow with an iron band and set his ears ringing. He gasped with the pressure that was heightening three and four times as fast as it should for his safety, and his heart hammered at his ribs as though it would crash through them.

Gasping, shaken by the pounding of his heart, the iron band squeezing his skull, Carter planted his legs firmly on the floor of the lock and his shoulder against the gate, and exerted every last bit of his strength in a shove that would open the gate at the earliest split-second the equalizing pressure within and without would permit. He was thankful that the amount of air taken from the Tunnel, required to

fill the lock to fifty pounds, would not endanger the Shield.

After awhile the steel wall started to move, and then, as air gusted in through the slit between its edge and its jamb, it flew open, and Carter was plunging through it, running headlong toward the Shield at the edge of the Big Bore, while the door clanged shut again behind him.

"Dan," he yelled. "Dan Ryan!" Only the echoes of his own shout answered him. "Dan!" he yelled. . . .

Something was moving there in the fog ahead of him. Something white—a swirl of the fog caught in the dim light of the infrequent overhead bulbs? No. Whiter it was than the fog, and edged with black, and there was about it an aura of menace. Jerry Carter slowed, came to a stop as it formed more completely out of the haze.

It was a woman who stood there in the tunnel, awaiting him. A woman cloaked in lustrous black tresses that cascaded to her knees, but otherwise not clothed at all. Her tiny feet were pink and perfect on the wet-black floor of the tunnel, the skin of her white legs were satin. The in-curve of her hips was velvet to the eye, and a torch to set fire to the blood of a man. The curve of her breasts was a song of ultimate passion. Her face was shadowed by the shadow of her hair, but Jerry Carter knew that there were moist, red lips in that shadow, lips half-parted and the tip of a pink tongue. . . .

The white, slim fingers of the woman held the handle of a whip, and the lash of the whip hung sinuous along the pale whiteness of her thighs. Her thighs blushed with the pulse of the blood beneath their transparent, blue-veined skin, and the blood of Jerry Carter answered that pulse, and the fire that was in his blood burned all thought and all honor from his brain; all thought of Dan Ryan, and of the sweet Diane who was his betrothed.

The hand of the woman rose and beck-

oned Jerry Carter, the lash of her whip hanging sinuous from it. Somewhere within him, deep within him, a warning whisper said to him, "Beware! This is the Devil's Virgin, this is Lilith," but he did not hear the whisper. His legs water-weak with desire, he went to her, and as he neared her the lash she held rose above her head.

He was near her now, near enough to reach for her, and his hand came up to grasp her. The whiplash whistled, slashing down. It slashed Jerry Carter's hand, grooving his fingers with red.

The woman laughed; her laugh the silvery trill of running water in a dark cave; and the whistling lash slashed across Jerry's face, cutting deep into his cheek. The woman laughed, and the Big Bore took up her laughs, echoing and reechoing them till it seemed that a thousand imps laughed in the dim fog of the iron-lined Tunnel under the river. Her whip slashed across Jerry Carter's mouth and across his brow. His face was bathed with his blood and he saw her through a red haze, her white curves glinting through a cascade of raven hair.

CHAPTER THREE

The Metal Monster

FROM the taxi where Jerry Carter had left her, Diane Forbes heard sudden shouts inside the timbered building into which her lover had vanished. And then a gruff roar came clear and distinct. "Stop him! Stop that Carter if you've got to put a bullet into him. He's a homicidal maniac bent on wrecking the tunnel!"

"No!" the word choked in Diane's throat, and then she was out of the taxi, was running across the flood-lighted yard, was being swept into the Shaft House by a surge of the police who'd been standing around its door. Inside, a burly officer with bleeding lips was bellowing commands into a boiling confusion, and blood-

spattered men writhed on a muck-scummed floor, and white-clad internes moved imperturbably through the tumult. But Jerry Carter was nowhere to be seen.

Diane was thrown out of the rush of cops like a bit of flotsam thrust out of an eddy. She stood there, hand to breast, eyes wide. In that clamor no one seemed to notice the white-faced girl in her misty gown from whose chiffon and silver perfect shoulders rose, as though Venus once more was being born out of whispering, moon-touched sea-foam.

The police were pouring down into a square, black hole in the floor, and others were crowding on to the platform of a cageless elevator that creaked and carried them down out of sight. A man in a wet rubber coat and a wide-brimmed rubber hat was passing her and Diane recognized him as Bill Fogarty, to whom Jerry once had proudly introduced her.

She snatched at Fogarty's sleeve. "Why do they want to shoot Jerry? Why do they think he's a madman?" she gasped.

"He slugged a cop." The man grinned, turning to her. "An' faith, no Irishman coulda done it better—But he's not crazy, except with the frenzy to save a man in the Tunnel. . . . And what brought you here, Miss Forbes?"

"Where is Jerry?" the girl demanded, ignoring the question. "Where—"

Fogarty shrugged. "He went down below, like a streak, an' they're goin' down after him. They—" He checked as a hollow, faraway shout came out of the elevator shaft.

The shaft funneled words clear and distinct to the surface. "He's not in the lock. He's gone through into the tunnel, an' he's fixed this damn door so's we can't go in after him."

And then, just as distinct, the gruff voice of the police captain Jerry had slugged; "Send the Emergency Squad down to burn the door in."

"You can't do that, cap," another voice

protested. "If the door from the lock into the tunnel is open, it will vent the pressure and let in the river."

"Then you guys wait right here, in case he tries a rush out, while we get the lock fixed. He's a menace to humanity—so shoot to kill if he fights."

Fogarty's grin was tight-lipped and snarling. "They'll do just that," he grunted. "Hardshell Gannon and his bunch of uniformed plug-uglies. The toughest bunch of cops on the force, they are. They got that way fighting the water-front gorillas, and they don't know when a man's crazy with coke—or just tough. But the Chief's safe enough as long as he stays in the Tunnel. Hardboiled as they are, they ain't hard enough to tackle the heavy air in the Bore." He started across to the switch-pumps under the bank of gauges. "I'll just see that it stays at fifty—" The sentence wheezed into a gasp, and the pump-man was gaping at the big central gauge, his lips graying.

"What is it?" Diane exclaimed.

His arm jerked up, pointed to the gauge. "It's hit the Big Bore itself now. Look!"

Diane looked and saw that the needle on that gauge was moving, already it was at forty-eight, was dropping to forty-seven, slowly, inexorably. It touched the forty-seven mark—

Fogarty leaped to the switches for which he started, was checking them with shaking fingers, as if to assure himself by touch that they were really closed, was listening to the *throb, throb* of the great pumps. "Nothing wrong here," he groaned. "But the air's goin' out of the Tunnel."

Carter had told Diane enough of the mechanics of high-pressure work for her to know what that meant. She reached the pump-man, twitched at his sleeve. "The river will break into the Tunnel and Jerry will be killed. You've got to stop it."

Fogarty turned to her, his nostrils flaring, his eyes dead. "I can't stop it. Nobody can stop it soon enough to save the Chief."

"Then we've got to warn Jerry."

"How? The 'phone's are down there in the compartment where those cops are. They'll hear us calling him, an' they'll be ready—"

"That's right. But look, Fogarty. Didn't Jerry once show me an emergency lock separate from the other? If someone goes in through that, and tells Jerry about the police—"

"Yeah. But I've got to stay here an' keep these pumps goin', best as I can, an' with the rest of the crew laid out, there's nobody else—"

"Of course there is." Diane glanced up at the gauge. The needle was down to forty-six. "There's me."

"You!" the tunnel-man gasped. "You wouldn't dare go where them tough cops are afraid to risk their skins. Your life wouldn't be worth a wax-candle in hell—"

"It would be worth less than that to me if anything happens to Jerry. Quick. Tell me how to work the emergency lock."

The pump-man's eyes were wide with admiration. "By gorry," he exclaimed. "I believe you mean it." And then he was snatching a set of oilskins from a peg. "Here! These belong to one of the water boys on the day shift. Get into them while I tell you. . ."

And then in hurried, crisp syllables he was giving her directions. . . .

TWO hundred and fifty feet down in the bowels of the Earth, brute-jawed cops watched the airlock gate with drawn guns while others scurried about with all manner of tools, lashed by the blistering tongue of Hardshell Gannon to hasten in locating the trouble with the air-line pipes. They were too busy, those cops, to pay any attention to the boyish form in oilskins too big for it that stole out of the

shadows where the ladder from the surface ended, and slid unobtrusively along a dripping wall, and merged with the shadows behind the great air pipes that writhed down from above, throbbing with the throb of the pumps Bill Fogarty tended.

Diane stared into the dimness behind the great, throbbing pipes, and she saw the rivet-studded small door in a concrete wall for which she searched. Her slender fingers came out of a flapping slicker sleeve and twisted the clamp that held that door shut.

For an instant Diane stared into the lightless, grease-pungent hole thus revealed, and a sob pulsed in her throat. Then she went into the hole, and pulled the door shut behind her, and groped for the dogs Fogarty had said would be on its inner surface. The dogs slipped into their catches, locking her into the blackness that was narrow and silent as a grave.

Diane's hand trailed along cold metal, came to a tumbler switch and threw it. There was the whirl of a starting motor, and a throb, somewhere in the dark and a hiss of incoming air that pulsed in rhythm with the throbbing.

She had only to wait, now, till a click ahead would tell her that the air in this gravelike box had reached the density of the air in the Tunnel and the way to Jerry was open for her. Only to wait, doing nothing, but that waiting in the dark would be long and terrible.

A THOUSAND fiends laughed at Jerry Carter, and all about him was the hiss of the woman's lash. Through the haze of the blood that streamed from the cuts the lash made, he could see only her white, and voluptuous body, only her laughing lips, moist and red and desirous.

Carter snatched at the whip, growling. If he could grasp it, if he could tear it from her, he could get his hands on her,

and drag her to him. The lash was a knife slicing his fingers, cutting his fingers, cutting his clothes into rags, picking the rags away. Already his coat was gone, and his shirt hung in ribbons, and the whip-tip was flicking his skin.

Jerry stumbled into the whirr of the whip, trying to reach the white lusciousness of her who wielded it. He was aware of no pain but only of the heat of the fire within him that her nearness kindled, and always the gap between them remained the same as she retreated, always almost within his reach, and always just beyond it.

And always the woman laughed, and the long Tunnel took up her laugh and turned it into the laughing of a myriad tiny imps. Half naked now, Jerry Carter heard that laughter, and it was like the gurgle of water, and the hiss of the whip was like air hissing into the Tunnel.

Coldness, a spray of cold water, struck his face and washed the blood from his eyes. *The spray jetted from a seam in the Tunnel's iron wall!* A blow!

Carter grabbed with both hands for the whirring lash, and it cut his hands, but he held it. He jerked it free and he sprang. But the woman shrieked and whirled away, and was gone; into the fog of the Bore or into the nothingness from which she had come, he could not tell.

He could not tell, and he did not care. He whirled back to that white jet that hissed into the Tunnel, and he saw that in the split-second since his first glimpse of it, it had widened. The whole unimaginable weight of the river above was behind that thin spout of water. The whole force of the river was plucking at the jointure of iron plates where the water came through, was tearing it asunder.

It must be stopped! Before the seam opened and a plate was ripped loose, and an unstoppable breach was made in the Tunnel's defense against the river.

Carter glanced around. He saw one of

the piles of sandbags that were placed all along the Bore for just this eventuality. He leaped to this and had one of the bags in his arms, and was staggering back to the blow. He heaved the bag against the place where the water spurted in. There was a gurgle, and silence . . . and then the bag was moving back like a thing alive and the water whose force moved it, was spurting in again.

But Carter had another bag in his arms by then. He fell with it beside the first one. His feet caught and braced themselves against the edge of a rail, and his shoulder braced against the two bags. His lacerated body, the rags of its finery fluttering from it, arced with the taunting of all its muscles. Little by little the bags moved back to the Tunnel wall and closed the breach in it.

Jerry Carter had made a bulwark against the invading river out of his body, out of its bones and its muscles. But the monstrous force of the river pressed against the bags his body held in place, and Carter knew that his muscles, that no human muscles, could for long hold those bags where they must be held if the Tunnel were to be saved.

HE MUST build a buttress of sandbags. The sandbags were within his sight, but beyond his reach. He couldn't get them from here, and he dared not leave here to get them, or by the time he got back with them they would be of no use at all.

"Blow!" Jerry shouted. "*Blo-o-ow!*" The long shout that has boomed from the mouth of many a tunnelman who has held bags against a break like this, and called to his fellows for help. "*Bl-o-o-ow!*" Jerry Carter boomed. And then he recalled that he was alone in the Bore, that there was none to hear his cry, none to come to his aid. His cry became a hoarse inhalation of breath into bursting lungs, a whimper of protest at the unendurable

agony in his muscles. His eyes bulged from their straining sockets, and a dimness came into them.

In that dimness a vague form moved, babbling inanely. Something was thrust under Carter's straining arms. It was a sandbag! Another sandbag came out of the shuddering darkness and, with the first two, the four bags reached as far as the rail against which Carter's feet were braced. He kned them down, making them more compact, and the strain was gone from his body.

He rolled, and staggered erect, and turned to the strange, liquid babbling he heard. He saw a form sprawled at the base of the sandpile, saw arms reaching up to claw another bag from its top. It was a man, but something was grotesquely not man-form about him—

He had no legs! The two crushed and bloody things that trailed behind that great, hairy torso could never have been legs.

The bag tumbled down, and the man twisted to bunt it along with his shoulder, while he shoved his own gargoyle-like body along with his arms. Carter saw a face wealed with red, empty-eyed, the mouth gaping open to show the quivering stump of a tongue from which that weird babbling came.

"Ryan!" Carter croaked. "Danny Ryan."

The monstrous hulk whose *Hallow'en* mask of a face so weirdly resembled Dan Ryan's, did not look up but hitched along, shoving that sandbag ahead of him. Dying, maimed and mindless, Carter's howl of "*Blo-o-o-w*," had touched within him the deathless loyalty to the job that is of the very bone and sinew and soul of the tunnelmen; had called him from some unimaginable limbo where he had been left for dead.

Carter grabbed the bag and heaved it on top of the others, and staggered back to meet the babbling Ryan as the latter

shoved another along with his shoulder. This took its place on the rapidly growing buttress, and then another.

As he worked, Carter became aware of a curious lightness. "It's as if the pressure was lessening," he muttered, and then was shaken with the realization that this was exactly what was occurring. Somewhere there was a leak of air, for the throbbing of the airlines was more rapid than he'd ever heard it, a fever pulse of pumping over-exerting itself to make up for that bleeding of pressure.

That was the reason for this blow! There had been a flaw in the seam-welding here, and so here the river had started through first. This one was stopped, but if the pressure got much lower a thousand perfect seams would blow in, and no human power could save the Tunnel!

The leak of air must be somewhere ahead. Could he find it before it got so bad the pumps could not keep up with it? If he found it, could he stop it?

Against the menace to the Tunnel, poor Ryan faded into insignificance. Jerry whirled and started running toward the Shield, his eyes scanning the dripping, iron walls of the Bore as he ran.

He was weaker than he thought. He stumbled and fell, and shoved himself erect—and froze, peering into the steamy fog.

Something clanged, ahead there, as though a ponderous mass of metal were moving toward him. A huge darkening formed in the luminous dimness, and then a grotesque and incredible monster loomed over Jerry Carter. Twice the height of a man it was, and twice the width, and it seemed to be all of metal; a globular head with a single, goggling eye; a cylindrical torso; ball-and-socket jointed legs; gargantuan arms whose hands were cruel, hooked pincer-jaws.

Before Carter could turn to flee, before even he was quite certain this was real, one of those arms flailed out and its

pincer hand had closed on his arm, and it was flinging him into the air.

His head struck the roof of the Tunnel, and black oblivion crashed into Jerry Carter's skull.

CHAPTER FOUR

Torture in the Deep

THE hissing darkness closed on Diane Forbes as the Iron Maiden had closed on the Inquisition's victims in the Middle Ages. Slowly it closed on Diane, with increasing, even pressure, almost gentle at first, almost caressing, and then greater and greater till her heaving breast had no room to breathe, and her limbs were numbed and motionless, and the very walls of her arteries seemed about to cave in on the pulsing blood within them.

With the growing pressure grew the fear within her, the terrible fear of the unknown. The fear dragged her hand to the switch that, pressed down, would reverse the pumps and withdraw the pressure, and let her out of this awful place. And then the thought of Jerry stayed her hand and it fell away.

"Jerry," she moaned. "Jerry dear."

Abruptly there was the click ahead for which she waited. What must she do now? She couldn't remember. Panic struck at her for an instant. "Jerry," she whimpered, and recalled Fogarty's directions and was wrenching at the metallic coldness of a wheel in front of her, and the door was opening, and light dazzled her, and she tumbled out into the steamy, yellow dimness of the Tunnel.

And then she was running through the muck and mire of the Big Bore.

The Tunnel flung back her high, clear voice, mocking her with "Jerry" and "Jerry," repeated a thousand times, but Jerry did not answer.

Diane Forbes came to a place where sandbags were ranged in a row across the Tunnel. She scrambled over the bags, and

on the other side she saw a sprawled and bloody form. Her legs gave way and she fell, the rough jute of the bags stripping the filmy hose from her legs, shredding the gossamer chiffon and silver of her gown. The yellow mud splashed about her, and she was shoving herself up so she could see the face of the man who lay across the sandbags.

The face of horror she saw caught Diane's throat and wrenched a scream from it, but it was the face of no one she'd ever known.

"Jerry?" she cried at the face. "Where's Jerry Carter?"

The eyes in the face rolled and the mouth in the face opened, and a senseless babble came out of the tongueless mouth. And then there was a touch on Diane's shoulder.

"Come," a low, kindly voice said. "Come with me and I'll take you to Jerry Carter."

Diane looked up, and she saw that it was a woman who spoke, a woman whose white face was framed in hair black as the night. "You will?" Diane said, and for the moment it did not seem curious to her that a woman should be here in the Tube, for she thought only of the woman's promise to take her to Jerry. "Oh, thank you," she said, and stood up.

The man at her feet babbled more excitedly. Diane looked down at him to see that somehow he'd flung out his great-muscled arms, and that his horny hands were crawling up the black-haired woman's legs—innocent of covering! The man with the face of horror babbled, and his babble made no words, but Diane heard entreaty in it, and yearning, and the cooing of a desire that she was too innocent to understand.

And then Diane saw that the woman was altogether naked!

"Come," the woman murmured, smiling at Diane and ignoring the man whose hands were clawing at her. "Come with

me to your Jerry." But Diane looked into the black eyes beneath their slumberous, shadowed lids, and read something there that made her blood run cold.

"No," Diane managed to squeeze through her icy lips. "No. I'll not go with you."

The woman's smile was abruptly a grimace. "Oh, yes, you will," she hissed. "Yes, you will, my dear." Her hands came out from within her nubian cloak of hair, the white fingers of one were clawed talons flailing for Diane, and the other clutched a reptilian, hissing whip. . . .

JERRY CARTER came back to consciousness out of a black welter of pain, and his eyes opened on a wavering dazzling glow unlike the light in the tunnel. There was a salt tang on his tongue, and a briny prickle in his nostrils, and so complete was the illusion that he was in some underwater world that his breath caught in his throat and he dared not breath till his clamoring lungs broke the seal on his larynx.

But it was air he breathed.

His vision cleared somewhat, and he saw that he lay on the floor of a circular chamber in whose walls were windows of greenish glass through which he thought he saw the movement of black water. A sound of movement rolled his head toward it.

He thrust his hands down on the floor where he lay, thrusting himself up to a sitting posture. Terror ran through him, and a fire that was not terror, as he gaped at the woman with black hair and luscious lips, and virginal breasts.

The woman who'd whipped him—and had roused in him such a blaze of desire which had burned out of him all normal reason.

Or was it she? Her langorous face, her shadowed eyes promising such delights as man would give his soul for, were

not quite the same as that of the one with the whip. She knelt near him, smiling—

She was not kneeling! Her wide and enticing hips did not melt into the quivering, damask, skinned thighs, the legs of blushing mother-of-pearl that had tantalized Jerry even as the lash had bit his flesh. It was not legs, or thighs at all, that coiled beneath her perfect body. It was the silver-scaled tail of a fish!

Now Jerry Carter knew that he'd gone mad. The cops must have been right! He was lying somewhere in the Tunnel mad and dying. Of course. It was no more sane that he'd been taken out of the Bore into this glass-walled, sea-lighted chamber, than that a black-haired mermaid should sit there, smiling at him.

"I am real," a low sweet voice came to his ears. "See." Her arms lifted, so that her black hair concealed none of her from Carter's avid gaze. "Am I not lovely?"

"Lovely," Carter croaked, and he did not longer care whether he was mad or sane. dreaming or awake. He threw himself across the floor, to grasp her. . . .

And was stopped by an invisible barrier! His hands flailed against it. It was glass, so crystal clear as to be unseen. A silvery laugh tinkled in his ear.

"Not yet," the mermaid's voice said. "Not yet, my sweet. You shall taste of my charms if you will, but not yet." She was just beyond the crystal barrier, and she was laughing at him. "There is something the master must know before he permits our arms to entwine."

"The master?" Jerry gasped, quivering with desire denied. "What master?"

"The Master of the Waters," the maid replied. "The Old Man of the Sea."

Nothing seemed too strange to believe. "And what does your Old Man want to know?"

"Only where lies the main valve that will empty your silly Tunnel of its air. If you'll promise to tell him that. . ."

The amazing demand fractured the spell that had taken hold of Carter. "What!" More than desire, more than love, more than honor itself, was the Tunnel. Just as his call of "*Blo-o-o-w*" had penetrated the torture-maddened soul of Dan Ryan, so did that threat of destruction to it quench the heat that blazed in the veins of Ryan's chief. "You and your master can go to hell—"

Carter's defiance choked off, because there was no one to defy. The space beyond the crystal screen had gone black!

"You will tell me what I want to know," sere, intonationless accents rasped in Jerry Carter's ear. "You will tell me, and in moments."

"Try and make me."

"Torture will not wring it from you, eh?" The voice chuckled. "Will it, Jerry Carter?"

"Not as long as that's my name."

"I believe you. Not any torture I could inflict on you. But, look, Jerry Carter. Look who has replaced the mermaid whose charms you rejected."

DIVIDED by a vertical line its full height half of the crystal screen was transparent once more. Beyond this—Carter came up to his feet, quivering. Diane was on the floor beyond the screen!

She was staggering back against the curved wall of the chamber, unable to cringe further. Her tawny hair was clotted with mud, her face was mud-splattered, and out of it her hazel eyes stared at him, dark with agony.

"Diane!" Jerry shouted. "Diane!" And his fists battered at the gleaming barrier that cut him off from her.

"Jerry," her answer husked. "What have they been doing to you? You're all over blood, and your face—oh Jerry! Your face! . . ."

"A touching reunion," the voice of their unseen captor chuckled. "Really a

shame to add a third to it. Look, Jerry Carter."

The other half of the screen cleared. Ice sheathed Carter's body, and a sick revulsion shook him.

A pool of water spread on the glistening floor, only feet from Diane, and that pool was fed by streamlets from the mottled green and brown shell of a giant crab. Almost as large as a man's the seamed body of the crustacean was, and its great, toothed claws each spanned three feet. Tiny, black eyes glistened fiercely from under the pointed hood of the carapace, eyes that were fastened on Diane's form.

Feelers as long as a grown man waved slowly above the noisome creature, and then the horny body heaved and was moving sidewise, with a terrible leishureliness, toward the gleaming form of the girl Carter loved.

The whispering voice said. "Have you ever seen a crab eat, Jerry Carter? Remember how it holds its prey down with one claw, and with the other tears small bits from the living flesh? Tiny bits, Carter, so that its victim does not die for a very long time."

Carter's fists, his feet, battered at the crystal shield and it did not yield.

"No use in that," the voice chuckled. "That glass is strong enough to withstand a hundred pounds pressure of air, Carter, and so you cannot break it. And, that reminds me, the space where you are is now under fifty pound pressure, while that on the other side is normal, so that even if you did break through, the bends would twist your muscles and bring the blood bursting from your veins, and all you would have accomplished would be to give my pet two delicious tid-bits to feed on instead of one. The lady has been decompressed. She's more attractive that way."

Bruised, his knuckles bleeding, Carter ceased his efforts. He leaned against the

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hard, cold surface of the screen and stared through it at the huge crab as it neared Diane.

"There is one way you can save your sweetheart, and only one way."

Jerry hardly heard that. Diane's scream had reached him, a scream shrill with the terror of a small woods creature who sees a panther leaping down upon it. The crab's terrible claws were reaching for her—a foot from her they halted, groped oddly.

"She is safe enough for a moment, Carter," the dreadful voice husked. "There is another crystal wall between them. But I can lift that wall and let the crab through. See?"

There was a sliding noise. The crustacean's great claws moved upward a little, and then dropped to the floor, and groped along it, *and passed the barrier!* Only their tips, however. Where the claws swelled they seemed to be caught.

"I can lift it, Carter, till the claws get through to her, and then the rest of my pet, to feed on her. See? It is lifting now." The sliding noise continued, and very slowly the groping claws were squeezing nearer and nearer to Diane, as the gap they fought to get through widened. . . . Diane's golden skin rippled with muscles in a spasm of horror, and the throb of her heart was plain in the pulse of her breast, and her mouth was agape with a scream that was a rasp. "I will stop it, Carter, the moment you tell me how to reach the main valve of the pipes that keep up the Tunnel's pressure, and not an instant before."

"No!" Diane's cry came to Carter's ears. "No, Jerry."

Jerry wheeled around. "All right. I'll tell you!" The sliding noise cut off. "It is stopped," the voice said. "Now tell me."

"I'll have to draw you a diagram." Carter fumbled among the rags that flut-

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tered from his whip-torn torso. "It's too complicated to—" His hands fell away. "But I've got nothing to draw it with."

"Very well." The voice chuckled with triumph. "I'll bring you writing materials." The sound of surfaces sliding on one another rasped in Carter's ear again and he whirled back to Diane, but the crab's awful claws were still caught as they had been, and he whirled back to see an aperture in the opposite wall of his cell, and to see, coming through it, the gargantuan metal monster that had captured him in the Tunnel.

IT CLUMPED toward him, and Carter circled it, his eyes watching its pincer hands warily. One of those hands clutched a paper and pencil, and the familiar things seemed utterly incongruous in this place of horror.

"You need not fear me," the voice said. "I shall not harm you as long as you comply with my demands. Here." The jointed arm lifted with the paper.

Carter's thigh muscles exploded to hurl him in a flying tackle at the Machine Man! The battering ram of his shoulder struck just right to send the monster off-balance. It toppled backward, its metal arms flailing, and crashed through the crystal wall into the compartment where the great crab was.

The thunderous crash deafened Carter, and glass showered about him, and there was a great whoof of air past him. But somehow he'd flung himself away from the prostrate Machine Man, and had leaped on the back of the crab, and his monstrous mount was heaving around.

Pain seared Jerry Carter, rending pain within his muscles, tearing pain within his veins as the bubbles of nitrogen came out of his blood-plasma, released by the suddenly diminished pressure. Blood burst from his nostrils, and his head seemed to balloon, and he knew that in another in-

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stant the dread bends would have him helpless.

And the crab's great claws were reaching backward for him, gaping!

In the instant while he still had full control of his muscles, Carter snatched up a shard of the thick glass that was sliding off the shell he rode. Its knife-like edges cut his hand almost to the bone, but he lifted it and drove it down, straight into the crab's eye cavity, deep down into whatever brain a crab has. And then the spasm of the bends took him, and he was sliding down off that mottled carapace. But the crab was motionless in death.

Carter struck the floor with a thud that he did not feel because of the torture that tore his every cell and sinew, but somehow he managed to throw out an arm and send a clinking stream of glass fragments sliding toward Diane, somehow managed to croak, "Cut yourself loose with these. . . .

He was writhing on the floor, spraying blood, his magnificent frame netted with twitching muscles. The spasm rolled him against something hard and round, an arm of the metal monster, and it was moving!

The Machine Man, apparently stunned by his fall, was regaining consciousness! The realization pierced the shell of agony that encased Carter's brain. The battle wasn't won yet.

Biting his tongue with the anguish the effort cost him, he lifted and fell over on the metal sphere that was the grotesque being's head. He got his hands on its goggling eyes, twisted. The eye was a glass plate twisting in his hands, unscrewing. It came loose. Carter flung it aside and his hands went in through the gaping space where it had been and his fingers closed on a scrawny neck inside.

His fingers tightened, all the agony that tore him concentrated in their fierce clutch. As through a mist, darkly, he saw

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the face of the man whose throat was crumpling in the iron grip of his fingers. The face was seamed with wrinkles, and grey as Time, and it was a face he'd often seen pictured in the literature of his profession. It was Elkan Pond, inventor and scientist, whose gullet his fingers clamped!

A scream pierced Jerry's ear, and the hissing lash of a whip stung his back, and he twisted to see above him the face of the naked woman framed by her black hair, to see that terrible lash of hers lift and flail down. And beyond her he saw Diane, and Diane's hand had a splinter of glass in it. The glass splinter sliced down into the woman's back, and then the woman's warm flesh smothered Jerry, and a gush of her blood mingled with his own.

"Jerry," he heard Diane's voice, from far away. "Oh, Jerry!"

"Find—pumps," Jerry Carter managed to gasp. "Lift pressure—in here," and slid down into merciful oblivion.

JERRY CARTER, weak as a newborn kitten, lay on the deck of a huge barge. The dark waters of the river rippled against the sides of the barge, and the growl of the city's night was in the air, but it was Diane's voice he listened to.

"They're coming for us. Jerry dear," she told him. "I waved a red lantern till they answered, and now they're coming in a boat to get us."

"The Tunnel?" Carter gasped.

"Safe. While the pressure was healing you, Pond told me where he'd tapped the Tunnel Shield to pump air out, and I shut off the connection. Pond didn't dare cut a hole through the steel wall because the bubbles coming up in the river would have shown where the break was. He had to pump the air out through this barge, and his pumps couldn't work enough faster than the pumps that kept

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TERROR TALES

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the pressure up in the Bore. That's why he had to try to find out the location of the main valve."

"He told you that?"

"Yes, Jerry, before he died. He told me why he did it, too. All his money was invested in this installation and the diving devices he'd invented, the great metal suit he was in. . . ."

"I'd seen the patent papers for that," Jerry cut in. "That's how I knew there was a man inside. I remembered calculating that the thing was topheavy, which was how I got the idea of tackling it high and crashing the crystal wall with it. But go on."

"He wasn't money-mad, Jerry, but she was—the woman with the black hair whom in his dotage he'd come to love. She had drained the senile bachelor of his whole fortune. The only way he could keep her was to promise her more, and he figured he could keep the promise because he'd at last located the sunken frigate with its load of bullion.

"But that frigate lay right in the path of the Tube, and the Tube was moving toward it faster than he could get set to take it from above. He had to stop the Tube somehow, for six months at least, and he got the idea of doing it by flooding the Tunnel.

"He knew of the legend of the Devil's Virgin, and he got the woman to pose as that apparition, to scare out the sandhogs. He figured that by chasing them into the airlock and then venting the pressure from it to give them the bends, he'd empty the Tunnel for a whole night, and that would be time enough for him to pump enough air from it to flood it.

"He let down a big pipe to the Shield—maintaining fifty pounds pressure in this chamber, and all the way down the pipe—and sent the woman in. His scheme almost worked. He would have vented the Tube through that pipe, but he had no

LILITH—DEEP LADY OF DEATH

escape valves strong enough to carry that much air through his lock-chamber without blowing up the barge. All the sandhogs but Dinny Mara ran out, and he killed Dinny with the claws of his metal diving suit; but then Dan Ryan came in, and fought with him, and that delayed matters."

"Then I came in after Ryan—"

"Yes. But he had gone ashore by then, and learned you were in the Bore. So he signalled from shore for the woman to get rid of you, and you fought her and stopped the first leak in the Tube. Meantime, he discovered that the lock was being repaired. There was no longer time for his original scheme to work. He came back here in his speedboat and got into his metal diving suit, and went after you to try and get the location of the main valve out of you."

"The mermaid?"

"Pond had met the woman originally in a sideshow where she posed as a mermaid. He was always interested in curiosities of the sea, has a sort of underwater zoo here, one of the denizens of which was that awful crab. His paramour still had the costume. Pond knew no torture would get what he wanted out of you, but he thought she could vamp you. That didn't work, and then he decided to use me—"

"How did he get hold of you, Diane? How on earth—"

"I—I was in the Tunnel, Jerry," she murmured, her eyes downcast. "I—the police were waiting to shoot you for a maniac, and the pressure was going down in the Bore, and so I came in through the emergency lock to warn you—"

"You did that!" Carter shoved up to a sitting posture. "Diane. You love me enough to do that?"

"I love you more than enough for that, my dearest." Her arms lifted and stretched out to take him within them.

THE END