

Weird Tales

JUNE

LOOT OF THE VAMPIRE

By THORP McCLUSKY

an uncanny thrill-tale that
will hold your fascinated
attention

BLACK CANAAN

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

spine - chilling voodoo
and bitter magic

THE HOUSE OF THE EVIL EYE

By HUGH DAVIDSON

an exciting weird story
about a glance that
spelled doom

THE GRINNING GHOUL

By ROBERT BLOCH

a story of stark horror

THE TELEPHONE IN THE LIBRARY

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

a grim story of a mysterious
voice that whispered over the
wires in the midnight hours



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Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Loot of the Vampire

By THORP McCLUSKY

A goose-flesh story—a vivid, cery, blood-congealing weird narrative that will hold your fascinated attention

1. The Pearl Necklace

TWO men sat facing each other across David Eichelman's graceful, kidney-shaped desk. They sat in a room of richness, a room in which every item of furniture, every etching, every rug, every softly toned lamp, reflected impeccable taste. David Eichelman was a jewel merchant of international repute.

The hour was immediately after twilight. The jeweler still wore the conservative business suit into which he invariably changed, each noon, at exactly twelve; his visitor was already in evening dress. . . .

On the desk, between the two men, its leather cover thrown open, lay a small oblong box. Within the box four hundred thousand dollars in matched, strung pearls softly shimmered.

The visitor was speaking.

"You understand my reasons, Eichelman, for making this appointment after your regular hours. The young woman—you understand—and it must be a surprise. One cannot be too careful. You must pardon my inconveniencing you."

The man's words, softly spoken though precisely clipped in the manner of an accomplished linguist, were apologetic. Yet Eichelman, strangely, felt that all the consideration in them lay on the surface, that this lean, saturnine client of his was a creature without heart or human sympathy. For Eichelman was a judge of men as well as of jewels; and so he spread his hands deprecatingly.

"It is no trouble, Your Highness," he said quickly. "I am dining in town tonight; the theater, perhaps, later. I close the shop; I relax—and then you are here."

The client smiled, and in his smile there was no softness.

"You have negotiated with me in complete secrecy, then, Eichelman?" he asked carefully. "It is necessary, for——"

Earnestly the jeweler replied, "The bill of sale will be kept in my personal safe. Only the insurance company will know."

The client seemed satisfied. "Four hundred thousand, I believe you said?" He reached into his breast pocket, withdrew a thin black check-book.

Eichelman bobbed his head vehemently. "Four hundred thousand, yes, Your Highness."

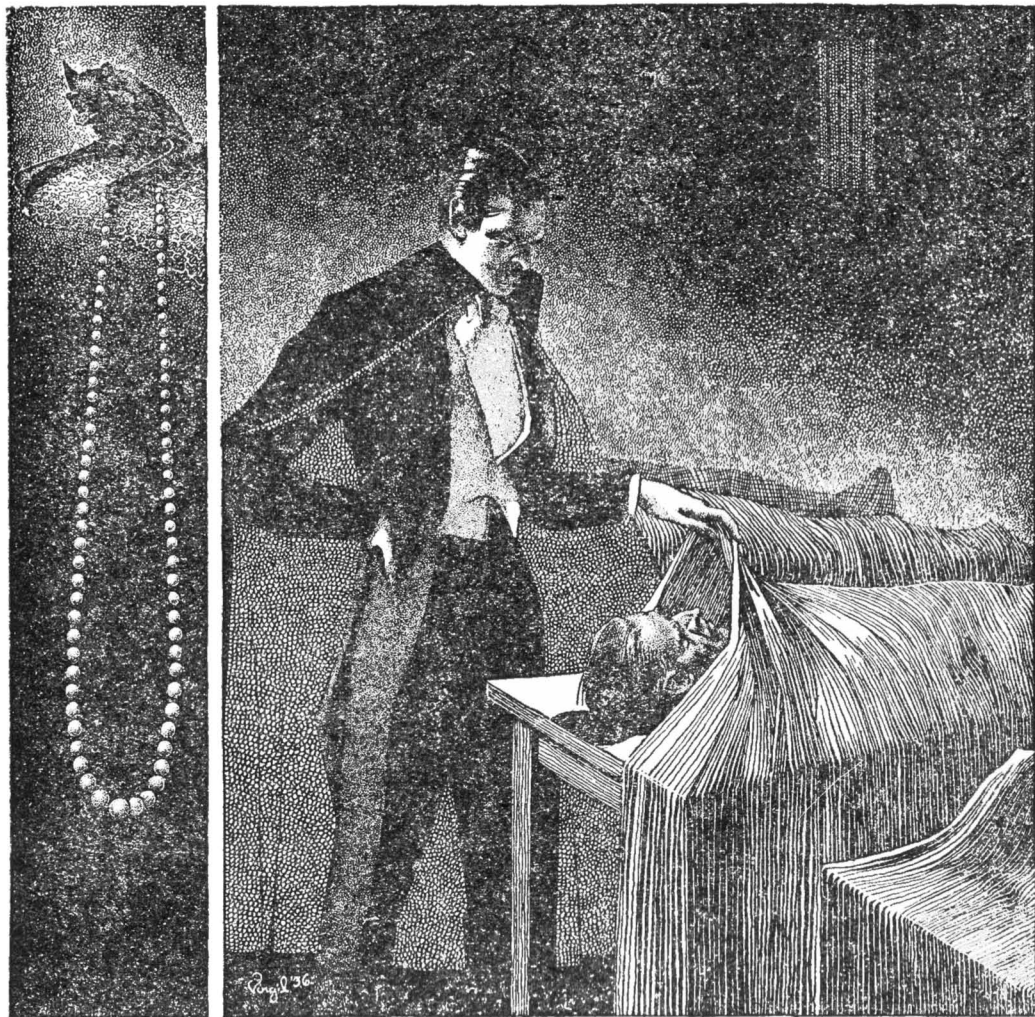
The other stared coldly at Eichelman. "My credit references were good?" he asked significantly.

Eichelman, suddenly choking, stammered respectfully, "Oh, yes, Your Highness. Eminently satisfactory, I must say."

A bleak smile crossed that deeply chiseled face. Without a word the client wrote the check, shook it carefully with his left hand to dry the ink while with his right he restored Eichelman's patrician gold pen to its ink-well.

Avidly the jeweler watched. At last the check was sufficiently dry. The client, as if to tantalize the jeweler, leaned his elbows on the glossy desk-top, held the check up between the thumbs and fore-

"The tall figure moved from slab to slab, lifting the gray sheet from the face of each gruesome unfortunate."



fingers of both hands, directly beneath Eichelman's nose.

The jeweler, staring at the check as a baby might scrutinize some glittering bauble, was not immediately aware that the other's eyes, a scant three inches above the upper edge of the check and less than a foot from his own nose, had fixed themselves inflexibly upon his face. Yet he felt uneasy.

His eyes lifted, met the gaze of that other, a gaze suddenly, incredibly smoldering, yet stone-like too, burning with

the unearthly glare of scintillant rubies.

Uneasily Eichelman strove to turn his eyes aside, but could not. His attention had been caught, imprisoned by a will far stronger than his own. Suddenly he felt afraid, felt his mouth go dry and his nerves crumble. He wondered if he were unbelievably dreaming, wondered why he did not speak, yet made no attempt to open his lips. It was as though an enchantment, an hypnosis, had been thrown over him.

He waited, then, for the other to lower

his eyes. But still that mind-shattering scrutiny burned into his skull. And then he realized that his brain was swirling, that a mist was forming across his vision. His client's face had suddenly grown dim; it danced and shimmered before him, lean, pallid, with thin red lips parted in a sardonic smile.

Eichelman, the strong-willed jeweler, knew that his senses were slipping from him like mist from the land, like fog from the water. . . .

2. *Silent Murder*

SEAN O'SHAUGHNESSY, store detective in the employ of David Eichelman, jeweler, playing solitaire in the glass-enclosed bookkeeper's cage near and to the right of the bronze entry doors, was growing uneasy. When Mr. Eichelman had asked him to wait, tonight, he had tacitly admitted that he feared his mysterious client. Yet he had insisted on admitting the man himself, had kept O'Shaughnessy hidden!

It was twenty minutes of eleven. And for upward of two hours O'Shaughnessy's thoughts had strayed more and more from the cards toward speculation, speculation concerning what might be happening behind that closed door, back on the mezzanine floor.

Except for the faint slap of the cards and the sound of his own breathing the store was silent. No murmur of voices came through the thick plate-glass door of Eichelman's office, but this gave O'Shaughnessy no concern; he knew that the men within could be talking with reasonable loudness without the sound of their voices penetrating farther than the mezzanine. Only the sounds of altercation, of physical violence, would carry to where he waited, within a dozen feet of the entrance. And there had been no such sounds.

And yet O'Shaughnessy *knew* that something was wrong, hideously, quietly wrong. At last, as the minute hand of the clock approached eleven, knowing that he faced a severe reprimand from his employer for leaving the bookkeeper's cage without a more tangible motive, he could stand the suspense no longer. Quietly, softly he threaded his way between the shrouded rows of showcases toward the stairs at the back of the store. Crouched just beyond the gleam of amber shining through the frosted glass into the mezzanine, he listened.

From within that closed door came only an unbroken, oppressive silence.

Grimly O'Shaughnessy knocked. There was no response. The silence within the room was tangible, like a living menace.

And then O'Shaughnessy tried the lock on the door. To his surprise, it yielded easily. O'Shaughnessy stepped quickly into the room, stopped short with a sudden, sibilant ejaculation.

David Eichelman sat at his kidney-shaped, mahogany desk, facing the door, but the stranger had vanished!

And Sean O'Shaughnessy knew, instantly, that David Eichelman was dead, even though his eyes were half open, even though he slouched back easily in his chair, his right hand lying negligently on the desk before him. The immobility of his pose, the glaze on his eyes, the colorlessness of his face, told the detective that he was already dead.

O'Shaughnessy leaped toward the window that opened upon the court at the back of the building, peered into the blackness beyond the light from the office. Although it was pitch-dark out there he knew the topography of that courtyard—a blank-walled airshaft between adjoining buildings, a brick-lined chimney up which only a human fly could climb to freedom.

And, too, its importance only just beginning to register upon O'Shaughnessy's

bewildered consciousness, loomed, inches before his eyes, the latticework of half-inch thick steel bars which protected Eichelman's back windows, bars so closely spaced that even the smallest child might not squeeze through!

Feeling a crawling begin at the base of his spine and sweep upward, shriveling the flesh like a needle spray as it passed, O'Shaughnessy gazed idiotically at those bars, at the dead jeweler, while waves of unreasoning, ghastly terror hammered through him. For, although the stranger had vanished, he had not left that room by the door and he could not have left it by the window. . . .

With hands that had suddenly begun to tremble, O'Shaughnessy picked up Eichelman's French phone and dialed the police.

3. *Strange Death*

POLICE COMMISSIONER Charles B. Ethredge missed the first routine turmoil that followed O'Shaughnessy's call to headquarters for the sufficient reason that on this particular evening he had been entertaining at the theater and at supper the young lady he intended to marry. The first inkling he had of the case came as his car drew up softly before her apartment house.

The doorman, saluting respectfully, came hastily forward, extended the Commissioner a penciled note that had been left by a prowler car, anticipating his return to Mary's. Ethredge read the message, turned gravely to his fiancée.

"I must go, dear. A big case has just broken. Eichelman the jeweler's been murdered."

Like the thoroughbred that she was, she offered no objections, asked no questions. "I'm sorry, Charles boy. Call me in the morning, won't you, sweet?" She leaned toward him quickly and kissed

his cheek. Then, before he could clasp her in his arms the car door had closed behind her. Just as she entered the foyer she turned, waved to him, smiled. . . .

Slowly he meshed the gears. At first lingeringly, then gathering speed, the long black sedan moved into the city's traffic.

When Ethredge reached the jeweler's, most of the plain-clothes men, the photographers and the prowler-car boys had already left. But Lieutenant Peters of the Homicide Squad, three men from the Detective Bureau, a police physician, and an Assistant District Attorney were impatiently awaiting his arrival.

And in a corner of Eichelman's office rested a gruesome wicker basket, waiting to receive the body for its brief trip to the morgue.

The greetings were terse and matter of fact. Ethredge listened, for the most part without comment, to Lieutenant Peters' brief resumé of the meager knowledge so far at hand. It wasn't much. It was made up half of O'Shaughnessy's story and half of the usual microscopic police search for material clues.

"You are holding O'Shaughnessy for questioning?" Ethredge asked significantly.

Peters grinned and nodded. "His story sounded fishy to me. That stuff about Eichelman kotowing and scraping to some mysterious client he called 'Your Highness' struck me as made out of whole cloth."

Ethredge had been rummaging through the desk drawers. "I see that the treasurer of this firm is a fellow named Ben Sigal. Get him down here. We'll have to find out what's been stolen. . . . No papers on Eichelman that might tell us anything about this mysterious nobleman of O'Shaughnessy's?"

"Eichelman's pockets had been rifled,

Commissioner. Very leisurely and very carefully, I should say."

"Doesn't look so well for O'Shaughnessy," Ethredge commented briefly. Curiously he surveyed the corpse for the last time, preparatory to ordering its removal. "Say! He looks awfully pale! You'd think all the blood had been drained out of him! How the devil was he killed anyway, Hanlon? Make a guess; it doesn't cost anything."

Stiffly Doctor Hanlon answered, "We haven't undressed him, Commissioner. But I've examined him as well as I was able without disturbing him. I can say definitely that there are no major wounds, no traces of poison on the lips or in the mouth, no signs of asphyxiation. The unusual pallor you notice may be due to a form of anemia."

Ethredge laughed.

"In other words, Hanlon, you mean that you won't play. There isn't a mark on him bigger than a scratch; so you say that he hasn't any major wounds. Boy, but you're careful! Well, it looks to me as though he bled to death, with or without wounds."

The bantering tones faded from his voice.

"You'll do the autopsy in the morning. I'll want to know how he was killed, as soon as you've finished."

4. *A Transfusion of Blood*

THE night had aged. The deep blackness that comes before dawn hung over the city like a sable pall; the city slept.

Yet Derwin, the attendant at the morgue, was not asleep. He had just received another body, and now, at the fag end of the night, he was sitting in his little office, trying, with the aid of a detective magazine, to keep awake.

And so it was that he heard those

sounds, those faintest of sounds, from that room at his back from which no sound could come!

Grumbling, his horse-face suddenly intent, he stood up, peered through the wire-reinforced square of glass set in the heavy oaken door.

The drama he witnessed robbed his body of strength, set his hands to trembling spasmodically, exploded his meager intelligence into instant insanity.

He saw the tall figure of a man moving from slab to slab, lifting the gray sheet momentarily from the face of each gruesome unfortunate, passing on. And at last he saw that tall figure whip the sheet from Eichelman's body and tumble it carelessly aside.

That tall figure, clad in formal evening clothes! He saw it sit on the edge of Eichelman's slab, bare Eichelman's arm to the elbow, perform the same strange operation upon its own.

From that moment Derwin, mouth-ing, trembling Derwin, could not have understood, even had he retained his sanity, the significance of what occurred. He could not have realized that the tall figure was giving the dead man a transfusion of its own blood!

And then, while his mouthings turned to inhuman screams, Derwin saw the body of Eichelman, the dead jeweler, stir and sit erect; he saw the lips of the dead man and his weird visitor moving in inexplicable conversation; he watched both men rise and go quickly to the barred window beyond the slabs, leap with inhuman agility to the sill, worm their way between bars so closely spaced that they would not admit the body of a full-grown cat, and disappear into the black night. . . .

Slowly, slowly, as Derwin watched through dazed, mad eyes, the window closed. . . .

And now no sound came from within

that room of death. But from without the oaken door rose the hideous, unending cadence of a madman's screams.

5. *The Stolen Body*

POLICE COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE, Lieutenant Peters and Mr. Benjamin Sigal sat in David Eichelman's office. It was close to dawn, and the three men were tired, their eyes red-rimmed. On the desk between them lay innumerable bundles of statements and packaged securities. The safe gaped open.

Ethredge addressed Sigal.

"Only the pearls are missing?"

"Only the pearls are missing, Commissioner."

Thoughtfully Ethredge rubbed a finger along his chin. "It would seem that Mr. Eichelman took them from the safe himself," he mused. "His fingerprints, alone, were on the dials."

"That strengthens O'Shaughnessy's story," Peters interjected.

Ethredge nodded. "Yes. Our criminal did not open the safe himself."

Abruptly he resumed his questioning of Sigal.

"Mr. Eichelman, you say, attended to all negotiations concerning these particular pearls?"

"Certainly. Mr. Eichelman personally conducted all the more important business."

"And so you don't know whether or not the list of possible buyers you have shown me is complete?"

"No. I do not."

"Have you heard Mr. Eichelman discuss the pearls with any prospective purchasers, either here in conference or on the telephone?"

Sigal, his brows wrinkling, went into a long resumé of fragmentary conversations he had overheard, of the negotiations concerning which he had been informed, and of others which had seemed more secre-

tive. Suddenly the Commissioner stopped him.

"You say," and Ethredge leaned forward eagerly, "that you overheard him discussing these pearls, on the telephone, with a customer to whom he spoke, deferentially, in both German and English?"

Sigal nodded.

"Find out," Ethredge said slowly, "what customers listed in your files have a knowledge of German. O'Shaughnessy says that when Eichelman let his mysterious stranger into the store last night the man spoke to him, using a decidedly guttural accent."

And Eichelman had addressed that stranger deferentially, as "Your Highness!"

"Find out, too," Ethredge continued, "what members of the nobility were among your customers!"

Suddenly, then, the telephone rang. Commissioner Ethredge forestalled Sigal, who had automatically reached toward the ivory and chromium mechanism, with a quick shake of his head. Picking up the phone, he put the receiver to his ear.

"Commissioner Ethredge speaking."

The voice coming over the wire sounded shatteringly loud in that tensely quiet room. Ethredge, as he listened, had to hold the receiver slightly away from his ear. But he heard the message to the end, put the receiver carefully in its cradle. And when he turned to Sigal and Peters his voice was harsh with amazement, amazement in which there was more than a hint of dread.

"That was the morgue," he said tersely. "Derwin, the night attendant down there, has gone stark raving mad. Eichelman's body has been—stolen!"

6. *Perplexed*

AT EXACTLY twelve o'clock noon on that, the second day of the Eichelman case, the buzzer on Commissioner

Ethredge's desk at police headquarters sounded loudly. The Commissioner leaned forward swiftly and snapped a switch. The raucous voice of the switch-board operator filled the room. But Ethredge barely listened. Before he answered he had known that it would be Mary. Mary was always punctual.

He met her outside, in the grim stone corridor, clasped her small gloved hands in a brief, wordless greeting. And then they were in the pleasant sunshine, away from that gloomy building which existed only for the punishment of human crime and folly.

"You're extra lovely today, Miss Mary Roberts," he told her, as she linked her arm in his and they stepped into the swirl of the noon-hour throng. She looked swiftly sideways at him.

"You haven't slept, Charles. Your eyes are tired."

He brushed his fingers carefully across his lean, whimsical chin. He had only had time for a shave and a quick shower on his way downtown from Eichelman's. "You're eagle-eyed, Mary." They were passing a small restaurant. "Shall we go in here for lunch?"

As he ate, Charles told her of what had occurred during the night. And Mary, listening intently, was worriedly aware of the grayness that had overspread his face, the perplexity in his eyes, the hesitating uncertainty in his speech.

Gently, then, she said, "You shouldn't try to do everything yourself, Charles. The detective bureau is competent, and, after all, the sun doesn't rise and set in the Eichelman murder!"

"I'm not so sure," he said somberly. "Mary, if we take O'Shaughnessy's word as truth, the fellow becomes positively uncanny. And the snatching of Eichelman's body from the morgue! Who'd believe an incident like that? But it happened. And Derwin's in the City Hospi-

tal at this very moment, babbling about dead men walking, about a mysterious stranger in evening clothes coming through the window and engineering the escape of a corpse!"

Gloomily he paused, then went on.

"I was at the morgue myself, this morning. And those windows were—closed."

"But you said that the dust on one window-sill had been disturbed," Mary reminded him. He stared at her.

"So it was," he admitted. "But, heavens, girl, no human being could have crawled through those bars, either at the morgue or at Eichelman's. It's an impossibility."

"That lets out O'Shaughnessy."

"Yes." For a few minutes he was silent, pondering. Then:

"The only clues——" he ticked them off on his fingers. "The man is tall; speaks with a German accent; wears evening clothes; was well enough known to Eichelman so that Eichelman would receive him alone after closing time in his own private office. He can go in and out of barred rooms as though the bars don't exist, and he kills without leaving any trace other than an appearance of bloodlessness in his victim." The worried lines across his forehead deepened.

They rose to go.

"Perhaps," Ethredge suggested, the old whimsical smile that she so loved returning, "you would check about among your society friends. Find out if any of our visiting counts, dukes, or barons seem to fit the specifications!"

7. *A Corpse Returns*

AT EIGHT-FIFTEEN o'clock that evening Officer Baynes, on duty at Eichelman's, heard the brisk rapping of a gold-headed walking-stick on the bronze door-casing. Peering through the glass, he

saw a small, roundly impressive man, seemingly in both an abominable humor and a great hurry to enter the store. Hesitating, the policeman saw the blows upon the door-casing repeated with redoubled fury. Almost instantly the night bell buzzed angrily.

From within the store came the running footsteps of Mr. Benjamin Sigal. . . .

"Dear God; it's Mr. Eichelman!"

The man's exclamation was a cry of sheer horror. His body sagged against the policeman's, the color drained from his face, leaving it yellow as old putty.

Officer Baynes felt a chill like the chill from a tomb sweep him. "Is it him as was *murdered*?" he whispered.

The blows on the door-casing were repeated with exceptional fury. "Open up, Sigal, you damned fool! What are you afraid of? Let me in, I tell you!"

With hands that trembled weakly, Officer Baynes opened the door. David Eichelman entered his own store.

"Don't stand there gaping at me like an idiot, Sigal! Come up with me to the office; I've had a hell of an experience."

For the first time he seemed to notice the officer. And in that instant his eyes blazed with red hate. "Well! They've got the police here watching the store, have they? That's just fine! And now," he stepped forward menacingly, "you get off my property!"

Bewilderedly Sigal protested, "But you were supposedly murdered. The police——"

Eichelman wheeled upon him like a cornered beast. "The police? Blunders! Do I look dead?" He laughed, and there was something in that laughter that sent the flesh crawling.

"You cop! Get back where you came from!"

The policeman looked helplessly from the irate jeweler to Mr. Sigal.

"I've gotta stay here until I'm relieved." But then a sudden thought struck him. "I can report back that you're alive. That oughta end it. Lemme use the telephone."

Eichelman's face was thin-lipped, stony hard.

"You use no telephone in this store!" he snarled. "You get out of here. You go down the block and call your worthless police. I don't want to see hide nor hair of any of you again!"

Officer Baynes looked imploringly at Sigal. Sigal nodded reassuringly.

"Yes," he said, "better call from the drug-store at the corner. You may say that Mr. Eichelman is safe and that he doesn't want to see any policemen right now. Perhaps in an hour or so——"

"Not in an hour, either," Eichelman rasped. "Tomorrow, if at all. Now get out!"

The policeman retreated before the red wrath in Eichelman's eyes; for Eichelman was a property owner and a taxpayer. Eichelman could make life hard for him if he wished. . . .

Alone with Sigal within the store, Eichelman led the way into his private office. They sat down. Mr. Eichelman did not speak. And as Sigal looked into his employer's eyes an uneasiness began to grow in him, to sweep upward within him until it dominated him, until it became *fear*. For, in some way, Mr. Eichelman had changed, subtly and horribly.

And then, suddenly, Mr. Eichelman stood erect, towered over his employee like an incredible doom. Sigal, looking fascinatedly into those red, red eyes burning down into his own, unable to tear his gaze away, felt mad terror clutch him, blanch his cheeks, stagger his nerve. And then Mr. Eichelman's fingers, strong as steel, were at Sigal's throat, were dragging Sigal, weakly struggling, across the desk top like a bundle of rags. For a

brief instant Sigal saw his employer's face close to his own, saw the hellish triumph in his eyes, the cruel, inhuman sneer on his lips. Then merciful unconsciousness blackened the picture. . . .

8. *Another Victim*

ALTHOUGH things had *looked* all right when he left Eichelman's, nevertheless Officer Baynes knew that he should have contacted Detective-Lieutenant Peters before leaving the premises. And so, within the drug-store, he carefully refrained from mentioning the fact that he had left the jeweler's. He did say that Mr. Eichelman was in a towering rage.

Dismay swept him when Peters rasped out briskly, "That's neither here nor there about Eichelman. You stay where you are until you're relieved. I'll be right up!"

In a tumult of apprehension Baynes replaced the receiver and quickly made his way from the store. Had he been ten seconds earlier he would have seen Mr. Eichelman, carrying a brief-case, come hastily from the bronze portals of his own establishment and walk to a sleek, softly shimmering Rolls-Royce parked a few doors down the block. As it was, he only subconsciously noted the luxurious car, with its three occupants, as it purred past him, gliding with pantherine grace in the direction from which he had just come. . . .

Arriving at the jeweler's, he tried the door, pressed the night bell. Utter silence answered.

Hardly before he had begun to realize the awkwardness of the position in which he had placed himself, a police car rolled up, disgorged Detective-Lieutenant Peters and two plainclothesmen.

"What's the matter here?" Peters exclaimed.

Stammeringly the poor devil replied,

"Mr. Eichelman was boiling mad. Told me to get out and stand in the street."

Peters, for a moment, looked at the man. There was something impersonal, almost pitying, in that inspection. Then he said briefly, "I hope everything's all right in there. If it isn't this'll either cost you your badge or send you out pounding pavements in Yaphank Junction."

He jabbed vigorously at the night bell.

"Here, Baynes," he said after a moment, "get to a telephone and call this place; tell them to open up. You say Eichelman and Sigal are inside? Well, we've got right of entry here; this case isn't closed yet, by any means, even if Eichelman *is* alive. There's a jewel robbery on the books yet, don't forget that."

Twenty minutes later, to the accompaniment of a shattering of plate glass, the detectives entered the store.

They found Sigal in Eichelman's office, sprawled grotesquely across the desk, his terror-contorted face blotched with purple, yet white almost to ghastliness, his eyes wide open yet unseeing. With a startled oath Peters dropped to his knees beside the man. An exclamation of relief escaped his lips; for waveringly, faintly, Sigal's heart was still beating.

Roughly Peters forced whisky between Sigal's clenched jaws, drenched water across his face. And gradually Sigal showed signs of returning consciousness. He moaned feebly, his head rolled from side to side, his chest heaved. A detective, at the telephone, had already called an ambulance.

Suddenly, as Peters chafed Sigal's wrists, his eye caught an almost undetectable, reddish mark on Sigal's forearm. It was a puncture, directly over the radial vein, resembling the wound which might have been left by the recent use of a hypodermic needle.

Outside in the street sounded the brief

wail of the ambulance siren. The white-coated ambulance crew entered; without a word the intern dropped to his knees beside Sigal. After a brief moment he looked up.

"This man's in no immediate danger, but we'll take him down to the hospital and put him to bed. That choking," he pointed to Sigal's livid throat, "didn't do him any good. And he's damnably anemic."

But Peters, with a sudden sagging of his squarely-hewn shoulders, had turned to the telephone, was dialing Commissioner Ethredge. For the safe door gaped open, empty jewel-cases littered the floor, a flat steel securities box lay open on the tabouret, and a cyclonic litter of papers was strewn in utter confusion across the red and gold rug. . . .

9. *A Silver-bladed Dagger*

AT FOUR a. m. on the third calendar day of the Eichelman case Commissioner Ethredge and Detective-Lieutenant Peters prepared to leave, for the second successive time in as many nights, David Eichelman's store. Intensive hours of baffled investigation had left their nerves snapping and jangling, their bodies dog-weary.

Two hundred thousand dollars in negotiable bonds and twice that value in gems had vanished in the second haul within twenty-four hours!

And at that moment, just as the men were about to lock that ravished office, a call came from headquarters.

David Eichelman's body had been found in a ditch on the Wolcott Beach Road—stabbed through the heart.

Ethredge swore one of his infrequent oaths. But behind that oath lay a renewed eagerness. . . .

Within a few minutes the Commissioner's long black sedan was sliding

smoothly through the suburbs, heading toward Wolcott. Ethredge drove in silence; Detective-Lieutenant Peters showed no inclination to talk.

There is no morgue at Wolcott. Ethredge drove directly to the red brick police station. Entering the building, they learned that Eichelman's body, for want of better facilities, had been placed on a couch in the small rest room just behind the sergeant's desk.

The Wolcott coroner was examining the body with a peculiar, strange interest.

Strange, because on the surface it looked obvious, sordid enough. A man lying dead in a ditch with a knife in his heart. The body had been thrown from an automobile; there was no evidence that the murderer or murderers had even set foot to the road.

And yet the Wolcott coroner was studying that body with a painstaking intentness that seemed, somehow, almost fanatical.

He straightened, then, and shook hands with Ethredge and Peters.

"This man, Eichelman," he said puzzledly, "must have been thrown into that ditch sometime after dark last night, so that he'd been lying there a matter of ten hours, at the most, when he was found. Probably much less; he may have been dumped out only a few minutes before he was seen. But he was dead for a good many hours before his body was disposed of. Decomposition had quite definitely set in."

Commissioner Ethredge heard his own voice incredulously ask, "How long has this man been dead, Coroner?"

The Wolcott coroner was very positive. "Not less than thirty-six hours."

Musingly the Commissioner continued, "So that he must have been dead for at least twenty-four hours before he was dumped out in that ditch?"

The coroner nodded. "For at least twenty-four hours, yes!"

Ethredge and Peters looked at each other. They *knew* that Eichelman had been alive at eight o'clock last night! The statement the coroner had just made could not be true.

And yet—it *was* true. The coroner could not be mistaken.

His mind trying desperately to reconcile impossibilities, Ethredge picked up the dagger with which Eichelman had been stabbed, and held it gingerly by the tip of the blade. Something about it had attracted his attention.

"That's a funny-looking blade," he observed casually. "It doesn't look as though it came with the hilt. It looks home-made, as though it was cast in a mold, and then fastened into the hilt and sharpened afterward. Who'd want to do a thing like that?"

Suddenly, then, Peters, in a voice taut with a horror which he alone seemed to understand, gasped, "That blade isn't steel! It's something softer. Silver! It looks like silver to me!"

10. *Count Woerz*

THE first brilliant rays of the sun were lancing above the horizon in a gigantic golden fan as Ethredge and Peters started back toward the city. Thoughtfully, his eyes alertly watching the road while his real consciousness studied the faint pattern of clues spread out within his mind, Ethredge muttered:

"God knows—we'll *have* to find, somehow, the explanation for these things that puzzle us now. And in the meantime we've picked up another bit of information. We've learned that our criminal drives an automobile."

"I suspect that he drives a Rolls," Peters interjected. "When I had Baynes on the griddle last night he managed to

recollect seeing a Rolls pull away from Eichelman's, just as he was leaving that drug-store."

"Check on that," Ethredge ordered grimly. "Or—wait. Better yet, I will let you off at the City Hospital. Sigal should be conscious by now. Ask him if any of Eichelman's customers own Rolls-Royces. I have a hunch that this fellow has traded at Eichelman's. He was acquainted with the jeweler, remember."

"You will be at headquarters?"

Suddenly Ethredge smiled. "I will be at headquarters within an hour. I am going to stop off and beg a breakfast from Mary. She might give me a lead, you know, along with my grapefruit and bacon."

Peters dropped off at the City Hospital. Ethredge drove home, bathed and shaved, put in a brief call to Mary, and continued on to her apartment.

Mary herself opened the door to his ring, ushered him into the breakfast room where already a percolator was bubbling cheerfully, bacon was grilling aromatically, grapefruit beckoned. She watched him, her dark eyes glowing, until he had finished and was sipping his coffee, black and unsweetened.

"What success, Charles?" she asked, then, quietly.

He shook his head wearily.

"And yet, Mary, you might rattle off that list of blooded acquaintances of yours who speak German. And who own Rolls-Royces!"

She closed her eyes, and her lips silently moved as she strove to recollect.

"Well, there's Bunny Brainard. He has a Rolls—but he's no nobleman, and he's girl-crazy. And there's Tony Castelloni; he's Italian, and he has some sort of title, but I don't think he speaks German fluently."

"We'll keep him in mind," Ethredge said, thoughtfully.

"And then there's Leopold—that's Count Woerz; he'd be just the man for you." Abruptly she paused, while a deep blush overspread her cheeks. Confusedly, then, she went on:

"He's sophisticated, you know; satanically handsome; wealthy; cosmopolitan; with a reputation as a heart-breaker. Serpentine, Charles; you loathe him and yet he fascinates you."

Her lashes lowered, her eyes darkened introspectively.

"I was quite intrigued by him myself, Charles, at one time."

"He must be the fellow we're after, then," Ethredge said, laughing.

But Mary resented that. "Don't jest, Charles. Count Woerz is really a fine gentleman. It's just that there's that strangeness about him. It's unfortunate, too. Recently there's been the silliest story going about that Katherine Grant just pined away and died for love of him. If he hadn't looked like that—so—so sort of *devilish*—people wouldn't ever have thought anything of it."

"What *did* she die of, Mary?" Ethredge asked easily.

"Oh, it was some sort of anemia, I think. She had to have dozens and dozens of blood transfusions. But in the end she died. You can see for yourself how silly all that talk was. . . ."

11. *The Count Has a Visitor*

WAS Count Leopold Woerz the man? Five hours of intensive, pains-taking labor had revealed an amazing series of facts. Commissioner Ethredge and Detective-Lieutenant Peters had definitely learned that Count Woerz *had* traded at Eichelman's—a diamond pendant, a few other small trinkets; they had learned that Count Woerz *did* own a Rolls-Royce, and they had learned that he was Eichelman's

only noble client who ordinarily spoke German.

Were these facts mere coincidences, or were they a series of delicate clues, pointing unerring fingers toward an elusive criminal?

The additional bits of information the police had managed to secure concerning Count Woerz had not been encouraging. They had learned that he was no bogus nobleman, but that his title and right of entry into America were unquestionable; the Woerz family was one of the oldest and had been, before the war, one of the richest in Hungary. Count Woerz was, in a polite manner, a globe-trotter. He was a man of considerable wealth.

Such was the character upon which Commissioner Ethredge had focused his attention.

Suddenly, with the startling unexpectedness of a dead man coming to violent life, he pitched his unlighted cigar into the wastebasket and stood up.

"I'm going out and pay a call on this Woerz gentleman, Peters," he announced.

Peters, without surprize, nodded. Ethredge strode almost light-heartedly from the room. . . .

Count Woerz maintained his American residence in an ultra-expensive block of apartments; a twenty-ninth story Babylonian palace. Ethredge, debouching from the elevator, found himself in a richly inlaid, cathedral-ceilinged foyer. After a brief, appreciative glance about, he matter-of-factly rang a small bell suspended above a superb table upon which rested a shallow urn, obviously a repository for calling-cards.

Presently the sound of footsteps came softly down a long corridor which extended back into the apartment, and Ethredge was confronted by a pudgy, blond man of indefinite age and oddly vacuous countenance. The footman did not speak, merely waited impassively.

"I would like to see Count Woerz," Ethredge said firmly. He extended his card. The footman took the card between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand and, without looking at it, dropped it in the urn on the table.

"Count Woerz is not at home. Count Woerz will be at home after eight," he said, in a colorless, guttural monotone.

The man was quite probably, Ethredge knew, both an old family servant and an idiot.

"I will return at eight-thirty," he said slowly, trying to make the man understand. The footman bowed stiffly, in a manner reminiscent of a mid-European foot-soldier. . . .

Ethredge left. But promptly at eight twenty-five he returned to that cathedral-like foyer, with its indirect lighting and its vaulted ceilings.

This time the bell was answered by a different man-servant, presumably the butler, a rugged-looking, almost brutish individual, with cruel, thin lips and piercing eyes.

"Come with me, Commissioner," the man said shortly, as he took Ethredge's hat and stick. "Count Woerz has kept this time open for you, and has asked me to show you in to him immediately."

Was there a hint of contempt in his brusqueness?

Turning abruptly, the man led the way down the long corridor and stopped at a small walnut door set inconspicuously in the superb paneling. Throwing open the door, he waited while Ethredge entered, then closed the door softly behind him.

THE room in which Ethredge found himself was not large; it was a sort of den-library. The walls were lined up to the height of a tall man with bookshelves, crammed to capacity with volumes which Ethredge saw, even at a casual glance, were both costly and well

read. A small desk stood near the center of the room, beneath a brilliant light suspended from the ceiling; at this desk sat a man. A comfortable armchair had been drawn up to within conversing distance of the desk.

The man rose, came out from behind the desk, extended his hand to Ethredge. And Ethredge, as they touched hands briefly, felt a shudder sweep him, exactly as he might react had he touched a snake or a frog. Struggling to control his revulsion he smiled, spoke briefly:

"Count Woerz?"

"Commissioner Ethredge. Please sit down."

Seated, facing the Count, Ethredge studied, without appearing to do so, this man he had so wanted to meet. At first glance he was disappointed; for the Count seemed merely a tall, sparsely built man, apparently thirty-five or so, a man with deeply lined features, smooth-shaven chin, hands of extraordinary length and delicacy, a receding hair-line at the temples, which were slightly gray. He was conventionally dressed in a superb evening suit and snowy linen.

For a few minutes they made small talk. Ethredge in reality did not know what to say, and it was Count Woerz who gently, effortlessly, made conversation. But at last the Commissioner asked bluntly:

"Doubtless you wonder why I am here, Count Woerz."

The Count politely inclined his head. "I would be interested to know, yes. Although our conversation is pleasant, still——" He gestured toward the papers littering the desk.

Ethredge, as always when he felt a battle of wits impending, reached into his pocket and extracted his cigar-case. Opening the case, he extended it toward the Count. Woerz's lips curled in a swift, fragmentary smile.

"Thank you. I never smoke. But perhaps you would like some wine?" And he motioned toward a decanter standing at his elbow.

Ethredge hesitated. But the Count, smiling, poured two goblets of the wine. Lifting his own courteously to his lips, he gestured toward the other. Ethredge took up his glass.

"You knew Mr. David Eichelman?" he asked.

Count Woerz inclined his head. "From time to time I have purchased of him." He spoke casually, yet Ethredge felt convinced that he was alert as any crouching beast. The man's eyes had flamed dangerously.

"You know, then, that he has been murdered?" Ethredge persisted.

Count Woerz shrugged. "That is a matter of common knowledge. I am as well informed as the man in the street, I suppose."

Ethredge paused, for a moment, before he continued. He wanted the full significance of his next words to strike upon the Count without warning.

"You are aware that you have been identified as the mysterious visitor to the Eichelman store? Do you know that you were seen driving Mr. Eichelman from his own store in your car at approximately eight forty-five yesterday evening?"

A lurid glare blazed up, like a clangorous warning, in the Count's eyes, and then as quickly died away.

"You astonish me," he said quietly. "I might suggest that there has been some mistake."

Ethredge, certain as if by direct axiom that Woerz, incredible as it might seem, was the man, bluntly rasped, "There has been no mistake. You were involved in Eichelman's death!"

Foolhardy, to have let his nerves drag from him such a statement!

Count Woerz had leaned slightly forward in his chair.

"Then I am to consider myself under arrest?" he asked.

Commissioner Ethredge shook his head, cursing his own indiscretion.

"Not yet." He rose to go. Count Woerz was looking at him with a curious, gloating expression on his immobile, deeply chiseled face. His thin lips were startlingly blood-red against the pallor of his face. . . .

"Sit down!" The Count snarled the command.

Ethredge sank back watchfully into his chair. Woerz looked at him as one might study some insignificant insect that has suddenly developed a sting.

"A word of warning," the Count pursued significantly. "You are attentive to a Miss Mary Roberts?"

Ethredge let the impertinence pass without a reply.

The Count continued. "At one time she was not wholly indifferent to me. You will pardon me if I seem to speak with too much conceit, but I think that it would not be too difficult a task to win her away from you. That might be my revenge, should you continue to irritate me. As far as the Eichelman matter is concerned, you have made, in coming here tonight, a complete fool of yourself. Good-evening to you, sir."

Commissioner Ethredge stood up angrily. Resisting an impulse to smash the man's lips into his too-pallid face, he turned to go. And then he caught a glimpse of the Count's goblet. It was still full to the brim; the wine had not been touched.

"You have not drunk your wine!" he exclaimed, astonished.

Count Woerz' lips smiled, and behind them Ethredge glimpsed cruel, pearly-white teeth.

"I do not drink wine, Commissioner

Ethredge. It reminds me of blood. You antagonize me, sir; I begin to think that I would sooner quaff a goblet of your blood than drink that wine! And now, please go."

Still with that mechanical, terrifyingly polite smile lingering on his face, Count Woerz watched the door close. Then, thoughtfully, he picked up the telephone and dialed Mary Roberts.

"Mary?" he asked, when the maid had summoned her mistress to take the call. "This is Leopold. . . . I would like to see you. . . . Yes, it's urgent. Shall you be at Moore's bazar this evening? . . . The dinner—I've wriggled out of that, but the gambling should be exciting. I'm to do the mind-reading, you know."

"I am not really . . . intimate with the Moores," Mary protested.

"But you're not doing anything in particular? Then come with me for the latter part of the evening. It should be an experience. . . ."

12. "Like a Wolf!"

COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE, back at police headquarters, sat down at his desk and rested his forehead in his hands. Dear God, what a mess! Not one speck of evidence against Woerz. Baynes wasn't even certain that the car he had seen had been a Rolls. O'Shaughnessy hadn't glimpsed the face of the man Eichelman had admitted to the store. Not one incriminating fingerprint had been found.

And the papers were clamoring for an arrest. . . .

Too, that stubborn coroner at Wolcott had reported Eichelman's body brimming with fresh blood, while twenty-four hours earlier Doctor Hanlon had been as emphatic in the opinion that Eichelman had just undergone a transfusion drastic enough to deplete his veins to the point of anemic death!

How could the body of a man forty hours dead and already in the first stages of decomposition contain an oversupply of living blood?

Feeling that to sit idly there much longer would drive him half mad, Ethredge leaped to his feet, took two swift strides, flung open the door.

"Peters!"

From the doorway of a room down the corridor Peters' head protruded.

"Come in here and keep me company," Commissioner Ethredge ordered, "before I go crazy."

Within his office he told Peters all that had occurred, every word that had passed between Woerz and himself.

"The man's foul," he said earnestly. "I can feel the evil in him just as I'd feel it, looking at a rattlesnake. He's like a wolf."

Almost as though speaking to himself Peters murmured, "Like a *wolf*, Commissioner? I wonder!"

There was a hint of earnestness in the strange remark that startled Ethredge. "What do you mean?" he asked slowly.

But Peters evaded the question. "I'd rather not say any more now, Commissioner. You'd think me insane. But I'd like to see that fellow myself, sometime."

"You'll see him," the Commissioner promised grimly. . . . There was silence between them.

Suddenly Ethredge spread his hands helplessly. "Damn it, Peters; I'm fidgety. I think that I'll go over to Mary's and cadge a drink."

He picked up the telephone. And Mary's maid, answering, told him that "Miss Mary has gone to the Moores"—to the bazar. Count Woerz called for her."

Stunned, Ethredge put down the telephone. He looked across the desk at Peters.

"Are your evening clothes pressed, Peters?" he asked, with seeming ir-

relevance. His voice was strained, unnatural.

"I guess so," Peters assented. "They were pressed fresh for the Saint Patrick's Day ball."

Ethredge wet his dry lips with his tongue. "Well, go home and put them on. We're going to drive out to Mrs. Weston B. Moore's bazar. And perhaps if we're fortunate you'll see Count Woerz, face to face!"

13. Mrs. Moore's Bazar

MR. WESTON B. MOORE was one of the many who had been mushroomed to richness by the Coolidge boom and one of the few who had retained his estate after the crash. A general opinion in more conservative circles was that Mr. Moore had never been overly honest. . . .

Be that as it may, whenever Mrs. Weston B. Moore did anything she did it grandly. Her bazar was no exception to this rule. She had dotted her gardens with thousands of multicolored lanterns. A floor had been put down on one of the terraces where dancing went on, to the purr of a thousand-dollar orchestra. Scattered at a dozen strategic points along the walks and paths a corps of white-coated waiters mixed drinks for the ever moving throng. A score of brightly colored booths, presided over by members of Mrs. Moore's own particular set, were variously billed: *Your Fortune Told—A Night in the Orient—Kisses*. Gambling, at cards and by machine, went on in half a dozen rooms within the house. A troupe of Javanese dancing-girls entertained at hourly intervals on the lawn.

Over all this scene of extravagance and semi-drunkenness presided, reluctantly, it must be said, the Spirit of Charity.

Mrs. Moore herself, a somewhat fleshy, artificial blond, welcomed Count Woerz and Mary at her little table set strategical-

ly at the entrance to the grounds. She greeted Woerz effusively; toward Mary she was gushingly polite.

"I *knew* that you'd arrive at just this time!" she chattered. "I was telling all the guests at dinner how you abhor dining out. All those who haven't already met you are just dying to meet a man with such an eccentricity! And when I told them that you were going to tell the fortunes!"

"Not tell the fortunes," Count Woerz corrected, smiling. "Just mind-reading, you know. It's merely trickery."

"Oh, but I'm sure there's much more to it than an *act*, Count Woerz! That sounds so sordidly professional. I've told everyone how you've been in Tibet, and China, and all those supernatural countries. You'll be quite the rage. You've always seemed so thrillingly mysterious!"

Count Woerz frowned. "I have never tried to appear mysterious," he said quickly. "I have always tried to seem as—as normal and human as possible."

Mrs. Moore blushed. "You're so modest! But now, I'm keeping you from the bazar with all this prattle. I'm so sorry. Do anything you want to amuse yourselves, my dears, and so glad to see you here, Miss Roberts. And at what time would you like to take a booth for the mind-reading, Count Woerz?"

The Count hesitated. "Well, not too late. Say from—from eleven until twelve. That would give your professional person an hour's relaxation."

Mrs. Moore gurgled ecstatically. "Splendid! I'll have the arrangements made right away. And don't make your—your sittings, or whatever they're called, too long. Just tell each person something startling about himself and then go on to the next. I've built you up into a sensation, Count Woerz. We're charging fifty dollars a sitting for your demonstrations."

Unaccountably, Count Woerz seemed displeased. . . .

AS MARY ROBERTS and Woerz strolled slowly about the grounds, stopping here and there to try their luck at the games of chance or to purchase some absurdly over-priced knicknack, they passed the gipsy tent. And this, unlike the greater part of Mrs. Moore's bazar, was genuine. The tent was old and battered; the banner, once gaudy and bright, showed a thousand patches and seams. And the ballyhoo was called out by a hook-nosed, swarthy man with the restless, black eyes of a true gipsy. Two children, squatting timidly on the ground beside the tent, were obviously the offspring of the fortune-teller, Romany wife of the gipsy. Wherever Mrs. Moore had picked up her fortune-teller, and presumably she had engaged the woman through some theatrical agent, she had secured a touch of authenticity which most of her show sadly lacked.

And then a strange incident occurred. Mary had stopped, fascinated, to watch the gipsy children. The man had for the moment discontinued the ballyhoo; for a client had just entered the tent. Count Woerz lounged a few feet away.

The gipsy glanced casually at the Count. The eyes of the two men met.

Perhaps some thought had been in the Count's mind, some thought which had left him temporarily oblivious of his surroundings.

The gipsy, gazing into those blankly staring eyes, suddenly shuddered, shrank into himself, seemed to shrivel with terror. And then, with trembling hand, he made the sign of the Cross!

Abruptly, then, Count Woerz did a strange thing. He grasped Mary's arm roughly, led her away. . . .

"You'll miss the Javanese dancing-

girls," he explained, when she protested. . . .

Following the line of booths, they reached the end of the midway. And presently the Javanese girls danced. Mary watched this portion of the entertainment with genuine pleasure; the Count, however, stood beside her with that air of semi-detachment with which he seemed to survey all human activity, as though it surrounded him without affecting him in the least.

As they were returning, Count Woerz looked at his watch.

"Will you dance, Mary, while I'm—entertaining? Or would you prefer to gamble?"

She considered. "I'd rather not dance. So many of the people here are strangers. But I wouldn't mind a whirl at the numbers."

He stopped at the entrance to the house, took a thin sheaf of crisp new bills from his pocket and gave them to her.

"If you win, we share equally. If you lose, the money is lost. What is money?"

14. *A Second Too Late*

COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE and Detective-Lieutenant Peters reached the Moore's bazar just as the announcement was being blared through amplifiers suspended above the midway, that Count Leopold Woerz was now in the tent of the Past, the Present, and the Future, and that for one hour he would demonstrate the art of mind-reading.

Oddly, Mrs. Moore had commandeered the gipsy tent.

"You wanted to meet Woerz," Commissioner Ethredge said somberly. "Here is some money. I had expected to donate something anyway; it's better invested this way."

About a hundred persons had gathered before the faded tent. Several in the

front rank seemed on the verge of paying their money and finding out for themselves what truth there was in Mrs. Moore's extravagant statements.

The first client, a middle-aged, portly gentleman, had passed through the loose canvas flap into the tent. And apparently Count Woerz, for the benefit of charity, intended to separate these people from their money with the greatest possible dispatch; for in not more than a minute and a half the client popped out again, a slightly dazed expression on his face, muttering incoherently to himself.

Woerz's first success had aroused the interest of the crowd, so that the line had become of respectable length. Commissioner Ethredge felt relief when he saw that Peters had managed to gain a place among the first half-dozen; at that rate he would be inside the tent within ten minutes.

Woerz mowed them down with machine-like regularity. They were only in the tent for a moment; then they came stumbling out, with dazed, half-silly expressions on their faces.

The man must, Commissioner Ethredge mused, be genuinely adept.

And Detective-Lieutenant Peters, now almost at the head of the line, had realized the gravity of the position in which he had placed himself; had determined to keep his mind fixed upon some inane jingle. Particularly, no thought of his should reveal his identity or his profession to the Count.

As he was making this decision he found himself at the head of the line; in the next instant he felt the fifty-dollar fee being taken from his hand, realized that he was passing through the dirty canvas flap into the tent.

Within the tent a single electric light burned overhead; two gilt chairs, a table on which rested the gipsy's professional tools—a crystal ball and a pack of greasy

playing-cards—were the total furnishings.

But it was only subconsciously that Peters took notice of these things; his whole attention was riveted on the man sitting bolt upright in the chair before him. Tall, almost emaciated, with aquiline chin and nostrils, the man stared at him through piercing, glowing eyes. For the rest, Count Woerz's face was impassive as the face of a dead man. His cheeks were deathly white. Only the thin line of his lips was brilliantly red, as though artificially carmined.

These impressions flashed through Peters' brain in the span of a second. Feeling something unaccountably like panic welling up in him, he set his mind to repeating, over and over:

"The clouds up in the sky so high; the clouds up in the sky so high."

Count Woerz's thin lips moved.

"Sit down," he said. Then, immediately, "'The clouds up in the sky so high'; you're resisting. It doesn't matter to me; if you resist you only waste your own money. What's your name?"

Peters' lips were silent, but automatically his mind had answered. The Count smiled.

"Peters. Your occupation? Police officer?" A cold light had flared in his eyes. "That's interesting. Do you know Police Commissioner Ethredge? Do you know me? And you think of me in connection with David Eichelman?"

The Count leaned forward earnestly. "You realize how impossible it is to connect me with Eichelman—how absurd it is. Don't annoy me further, please. . . ."

And then, suddenly as the rush of an electric current along a wire, Peters' brain reverted to its original purpose. And as he thought, simultaneously Count Woerz read his thought, for as Peters' hand plunged into his own breast pocket the nobleman's body catapulted forward, struck the gleaming rectangle from Peters'

hand to the dirt-stained matting. And then Count Woerz's gleaming shoe had crushed down upon it, shattering it into a hundred fragments. . . .

Frantically Peters strove to recall that inane sentence to his mind:

"The clouds up in the sky so high; the clouds up in the sky so high. . . ."

Venomously Count Woerz spoke.

"You have some very peculiar suspicions, Mr. Detective-Lieutenant Peters. I advise you to put them from your thoughts. They belong to the Middle Ages, to Medieval Europe, not to modern America. Should you dare to express them you would be laughed out of countenance. Now go."

He did not know that, in striking the mirror from Peters' hand, he had been a second too late. But Peters' mind was reeling with what he had seen!

15. *Mary Roberts*

PETERS' face, as he reeled from the gipsy tent, was the color of chalk. His lips were moving as though he was speaking to himself; stark horror gleamed in his eyes.

A pleased gasp went up from the on-lookers; Count Woerz was proving a sensation. . . .

Hurriedly Commissioner Ethredge stepped forward, grasped Peters' elbow and led him away from the crowd. Peters was staggering drunkenly.—Ethredge, selecting a deserted spot behind a clump of trees, paused. Peters had not uttered a word.

And then Peters put his hand before his face, retched, and was violently sick!

"In God's name," Ethredge asked hoarsely, "what happened in there?"

Peters shook his head. His face was bedewed with perspiration.

"I can't—tell you now, Commissioner. It's—it's beyond belief. Wait—wait un-

til we get where we can talk. Get—get me a drink, please."

Ethredge returned quickly to the midway, found one of the refreshment booths.

"A tumblerful of rye," he ordered bruskiy.

The white-coated attendant's eyebrows flickered, but he filled the order. Ethredge took the drink, put down a ten-dollar bill and turned back down the midway.

As he passed the gipsy tent he suddenly paused. A man had just come from that tent, a man darkly suave, with a livid scar on his left cheek that might have been made, twenty or more years before, by the slash of a saber.

Commissioner Ethredge felt the uncomfortable certainty that he should know this man. . . .

Peters, almost without pause, gulped the whisky Ethredge had brought. It seemed to steady him; with the support of Ethredge's arm he was able to walk back to the midway.

And then Ethredge saw, standing at the entrance to the grounds, Count Woerz and Mary! They were just about to enter Count Woerz's Rolls-Royce. Ethredge grasped Peter's arm.

"Come, Peters; get hold of yourself. We've got to follow them!"

The brutal-looking, animalesque man who had, earlier in the evening, admitted Ethredge to Count Woerz's apartment was now, in chauffeur's livery, closing the door of the car, climbing into the driver's seat. Slowly, then gathering speed, the car slid away into the darkness.

16. *Hypnosis*

AS THE car rushed softly through the night Count Woerz spoke solicitously to Mary.

"Tired?" he asked. There was a world

of kindness in his voice. He looked at her speculatively, was secretly pleased. For she was sitting relaxed, with her right cheek turned to catch the caress of the night air; there was no tenseness in her, no watchfulness.

"No, not tired." She fumbled in her hand-bag, drew out a roll of bills which she handed to him. "I lost," she mourned.

He took the money, put it away without counting it. "No matter. I expected you to lose. Did you enjoy playing?"

She laughed briefly. "As well as anyone could under the circumstances, I suppose."

"Then the money is well spent," he assured her.

Presently he spoke again, a little sadly, Mary thought: "Look at me, Mary. You are not afraid of me?"

Their eyes met: the Count's faintly luminous, glowing with gentleness; Mary's warm with the friendship she was trying to give this lonely, misunderstood man. And in her heart was the thought, "People have been cruel to him. They've the—the unconscious feeling that he's a sort of monster. But—he isn't."

"I am not afraid of you," she breathed.

"Look at me," he whispered.

His voice was like the restful music of a muted hymn. Listening to him speak she felt a delicious urge to relax, to let her eyelids droop softly shut. She felt apart from herself, drifting in a dream-world of utter unreality. The night-bound landscape hurrying by, the drone of the motor, the twin-eyed cars that rushed past in frequent crescendos of sound and light, had dwindled from concrete reality to the incorporeality of shadows. The only reality left had merged within Count Woerz's eyes: she felt that if only she could look into them deeply enough she could read there all the unanswerable enigmas of the ages. They glowed like the eyes of a god. . . .

Dimly, deliciously, she felt herself sliding, with ever increasing velocity, down the sides of an infinite vortex. Count Woerz's eyes were expanding, growing into twin suns, lurid, fateful, blood-tinged. The incline down which she seemed to be tobogganing became an almost vertical precipice.

Hot, nerve-torturing fear engulfed her. Desperately she tried to struggle back upward along that incredible slope toward consciousness. But now the precipice had vanished utterly. She was falling, falling, falling with ever increasing velocity into nothingness.

And then Count Woerz's eyes seemed to expand until they filled her whole universe, seemed to explode in a final blaze of malignant light! And after that—darkness. . . .

Count Woerz abruptly sat erect, looked down at the girl sitting, staring with wide-open, blind eyes into the utter blackness of complete hypnosis. The gentleness had vanished from his eyes; they burned in the semi-darkness with feral intensity. He spoke to her.

"You are hypnotized," he said slowly. "I am your master. You will succumb to me whenever I call, wherever you are. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Mary said. No vestige of controlling intelligence touched the words she uttered with personality and life.

The Count bent forward, brushed his hand several times before her eyes, spoke to her. With startling suddenness she awoke.

"Did I—did I faint?" she asked, bewildered. "For a moment I felt terribly dizzy."

"You were—a trifle pale," he reassured her. "It must have been the smoke in the roulette room. . . ."

Don't miss the vivid and inexpressibly weird chapters that bring this fascinating story to an end in next month's issue. Reserve your copy now at your magazine dealer's.

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



Loot of the Vampire

By THORP McCLUSKY

'A goose-flesh story—a vivid, eery, blood-congealing weird narrative that will hold your fascinated attention

The Story Thus Far

DAVID EICHELMAN, jeweler, is found dead in his office. Superficially it looks like an ordinary murder case, as a four hundred thousand dollar string of pearls is missing. However, Police Commissioner Charles B. Ethredge and Detective-Lieutenant Peters find themselves puzzled. Eichelman has apparently bled to death; yet his body shows no wounds; and it is impossible to learn how the murderer escaped.

Aided by Ethredge's fiancée, Mary Roberts, the Commissioner finally centers his suspicions upon a Count Leopold Woerz, mysterious nobleman and wealthy globe-trotter. Commissioner Ethredge calls upon Count Woerz and imprudently questions him about the Eichelman case, whereupon Woerz, who is an adept at hypnotism, decides to hypnotize Mary and so force Ethredge to discontinue his investigation.

Woerz takes Mary to the Moores' bazar, a charity affair at which he shows his skill as a mind-reader. Detective-Lieutenant Peters at Ethredge's suggestion has his mind read by Count Woerz, and is sickened and horrified by some revelation which he tells the Commissioner is unbelievable, but which must be true. Throughout the bazar Ethredge and Peters have not succeeded in locating Mary, who has been gambling in the house.

As Peters recovers from his nausea, Ethredge leads him from a secluded spot back to the grounds, and they see Count

Woerz escorting Mary to his car, too late for them to intercept him. However, they grimly follow the Count's car.

Count Woerz, alone with Mary in the tonneau of his luxurious Rolls-Royce, finds it an easy manner to place her under hypnotic control.

The story continues:

17. A Naked Skull

COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE and Detective-Lieutenant Peters had doggedly followed the Rolls-Royce into town. Incredulously, now, they were watching Count Woerz matter-of-factly escort Mary to her door.

Count Woerz had recrossed the sidewalk, was re-entering his car. Silently the two men watched the Rolls-Royce pull away from the curb, merge into the city's traffic.

Urgently, then, Peters spoke. "Commissioner, we've got to go somewhere where we can talk. That—that *thing* is dangerous. We've got to make plans."

Unsurprized, Ethredge assented. "Come to my home, Peters. I mix a pretty decent highball. . . ."

And Ethredge did mix a pretty decent highball. Yet Peters, sitting in one of the Commissioner's comfortable chairs, the tall drink within easy reach of his hand, found it difficult to begin.

"Commissioner," he said at last, "have you ever read about vampires?" There! He had broached the subject.

Ethredge fiddled with his glass. "Oh,



"I took a mirror into the tent, and looked at Count Woerz in it."

a bit at the library," he admitted. "And I've seen a few melodramatic pictures."

"Commissioner," Peters said earnestly, "vampires do exist. And Count Woerz is a vampire."

Ethredge laughed. "Nonsense, Peters. Vampires belong in the same category with ghosts and witches and all the other superstitions of the Middle Ages. You don't feel—you don't feel sick, or anything?"

Peters shook his head. "I feel all right." He picked up his drink, took a meager sip, set down the glass.

"Commissioner," he went on, with

that strange earnestness, "the world has believed in vampires for thousands of years. In every country, among every race, among both the most intelligent and the most ignorant we find a strongly ingrained belief in vampirism. An unfounded superstition could never have taken root like that, could never have surmounted the barriers of language, could never have crossed oceans and deserts, enduring through centuries."

Ethredge moved restlessly. "Folk-lore," he muttered.

Peters nodded. "Folk-lore, certainly, but folk-lore in which sixty percent of the

world's peoples believe, today; folk-lore which always springs, if we search deeply enough, from an easily identifiable, unchangeable similarity of phenomena. The attributes of the vampire are the same, Commissioner, whether you hear of him in America or whether you hear of him in Burma. He's demonstrated his existence for ages, Commissioner. What we've failed to do is to study him and find out what he really is."

"The undead," Ethredge nodded. "Not dead; not alive. Well, I'll listen. But I warn you that I won't be convinced."

A deep, expectant silence rested, for a moment, over the room. And then, at first almost diffidently, Peters began to speak.

"I've read about these things," Peters said, as if apologetically, "not so much because of any belief in them, but because I wondered how the legends of vampirism could have become so widespread. I wanted to find out why whole races of people could have deluded themselves with tales so impossible. My main reaction, at first, was a sort of wonder that the stories of vampirism I read should all possess such fundamental similarities. I could not find any satisfactory reason why this should be so.

"But gradually and unwillingly I was forced to accept the view that the legends of vampirism are based on fact, however obscured by the imagination and the ignorance of the narrators. And at once my interest in this whole train of desultory study became intense. I set out to sift the truth from fiction, to determine, if possible, what fundamental characteristics of vampires are world-wide and subject to scientific scrutiny. I wanted to learn just what a vampire could or could not do, to attempt to reconcile him with natural laws; in short, to explode the whole legendry of vampirism. Already, from the

fundamental similarities I had found to be characteristic of every vampire, I had begun to favor the idea that so-called vampires might really be members of some rare cult, very possibly possessing considerable powers of hypnotism, very possibly stronger, physically, than most men, due, perhaps, to extremely rigorous diet and exercise. The almost universal legend that vampires live solely on human blood seemed to uphold this hypothesis."

Commissioner Ethredge seemed relieved. "I've no objection to what you've said, so far," he admitted.

PETERS dourly shook his head. "I will tell you more. . . . I discarded, of course, as many of the impossible attributes with which vampires have been empowered as I could. I disbelieved that they could change their shape, that they could appear as wolves or bats, for example. However, favoring my theory of vampirism as a cult, I admitted that by hypnotism they could produce just such illusions. And I saw no reason why the vampire could not cross running water, or why garlic should be offensive to him. I traced the belief in the efficacy of the cross against him to the Church, which in medieval times recommended the cross and the use of holy water against all powers of evil. I believed that the vampire could be killed by a stake driven through his heart, and I believed that he could be killed by a silver bullet or dagger, but I also surmised that a lead bullet or a steel knife would do the business just as well. Oddly, in all my research I found few authenticated, so to speak, accounts of vampire destruction.

"I utterly disbelieved that a vampire could be a man who had died and was now 'undead', the term by which vampires are designated. I was certain that he would cast a reflection in a mirror."

He paused, shuddered convulsively.

"Count Woerz—cast a reflection," he whispered, then. "I took a mirror into that tent, looked into it—looked at Count Woerz in it. Yes—he cast a reflection."

With difficulty he went on. "That is about where I was, a dilettante in the study of vampirism, when the Eichelman case broke. And now, Commissioner, I've had to adjust myself to reality, to explain to myself a form of unholy life which should never live, and yet does live! For, Commissioner, Count Woerz is a vampire, and he is almost as the old legends have described him!"

"You mean that he is dead and yet alive?" Ethredge asked slowly. "Nonsense!"

Peters shook his head. "I don't know. Science will explain him, must explain him. I don't know if he has ever really died, or if in some gruesome way the advent of death has been suspended.

"He cast the reflection of a skull, Commissioner—of a naked skull, with living red blood coursing over it and through a mass of gray putrefaction! By what rare natural law that thing presented to us the appearance of a man I do not know; there is powerful hypnotism in it. Woerz is a *thing* that should have been dead twice ten years ago; he is a skeleton sheathed in living pus and rich red blood. That explains how he forced himself between the bars at the morgue; there was only the lank skeleton of him and a mass of slime to pass through that narrow space."

"Eichelman, though, was but recently dead," Ethredge pointed out.

Peters nodded. "Woerz had sucked his blood, had infected him. Eichelman, too, was a vampire. Putrefaction was in him; putrefaction began in him even before O'Shaughnessy found his body. Remember the coroner at Wolcott saying that he must have been dead thirty-six hours,

when we knew that he was seen alive the preceding evening?"

Gravely, then, Peters nodded his head. "Vampires are, indeed, dead-alive. They are creatures in which, by some rare process, the body which should be in the grave yet moves and, horribly changed, lives!"

He was silent. And they noticed, then, that the first gray light of dawn was striking into the room, dimming, making ghostly the warm glow of the lamps.

Ethredge laughed feebly. "Your vampire sleeps now," he said. "It is day."

Peters caught his breath. Might Ethredge be right? Might he, all along, have acted the fool, have sought too determinedly to disbelieve those things he had read of vampires? Might it not be that, almost in their entirety, the legends were right? Perhaps vampires *did* sleep from dawn to sunset. Could it not be plausible that the non-human processes which controlled their existence were affected by the clean sunlight?

Too, might not the silver bullet harm the vampire where steel and lead would not? Was his unhuman physiological structure antipathetical to silver? And to garlic?

These thoughts swept Peters.

"Commissioner," he said, "it is possible that you are right, that Woerz is asleep. We have no time to lose. We will go to his house and destroy him!"

18. *A Desperate Resolve*

HALF the day had passed, yet Ethredge and Peters had made no move toward Woerz's destruction. Instead, they were within the Commissioner's prosaically business-like office, arguing, arguing, arguing behind locked doors.

The homely routine of bathing, of changing into clean linen and breakfasting, had influenced Ethredge in a manner

Peters should have foreseen. As the events of the night had receded into the sharp reality of day he had begun to disbelieve those things which so few short hours ago had seemed plausible.

"The man's unquestionably a murderer, Peters," Ethredge was saying vehemently. "But we can't walk into his house and deliberately execute him on the grounds of any such wild hypothesis as yours. The law must take its natural course."

Peters cursed. "But, man, you don't know what hell you're letting escape! Can't you see that today, before sundown, is our last chance? Tomorrow he'll be gone. But last night he didn't have time to—to break up that unholy lair of his. He's there, now."

With the abruptness, then, of one coming to a sudden decision, Ethredge snapped, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll gamble my career, and yours, too, against Woerz. We'll arrest him, search his apartment. But if we find no incriminating evidence against him——"

Peters, grimly satisfied, nodded.

19. *The Undead*

"**G**ONE!" It had taken an hour's work with crowbar and ax to force the steel door leading from the elevators into Woerz's foyer.

"Gone!" Peters whispered, again.

That whole vast apartment remained deathly silent, still as the nave of a cathedral at midnight. . . .

The two men entered the corridor, stalked along its length, their feet sinking without sound into the rich pile of the rug. As they proceeded they tried the various doors. Some opened easily, revealing rooms of garish luxury. A few were locked.

They had come, seemingly, to a palace

deserted and abandoned by its occupants, waiting only for the life and laughter of some new master to make it a place of ethereal beauty.

"The den!" Ethredge rasped grimly.

Crowbar and ax sent the inch-thick walnut panels splintering inward. The room flooded into light. Peters had turned on the desk lamp.

But a search of Count Woerz's desk proved fruitless. Not an incriminating paper, not an ambiguous document.

From the desk Ethredge and Peters proceeded to the book-cases, took down book after book, ruffled the pages hopefully. Not satisfied, they sounded the walls, searched under the rugs and behind the pictures. And the search revealed—nothing.

At last Ethredge, standing in the center of the room, grunted, "We can't waste more time here, Peters. But we've already put our necks in the noose. Might as well search those other locked rooms."

And, just within the ax-shattered door of that next room, Ethredge and Peters stopped short in astonishment.

It was gloomy within that room, almost dark. Opaque curtains covered the windows; the only light that entered came from the corridor. And yet there was enough light for both men to see that the room was a richly furnished bed-chamber.

On the silken coverlet of the bed lay a woman, beautifully gowned, her hands lightly crossed above her round young breasts, her hair in immaculate perfection, her lips slightly parted, revealing the gleam of dazzlingly white teeth. The heels of her silver slippers rested daintily on a pad of velvet carefully spread upon the coverlet.

"God!" Ethredge breathed, as he stepped into the room. "She must either be dead or she must sleep soundly!"

He moved swiftly to the bed, took the girl's wrist lightly between his fingers, stood in silent concentration. Then, shaking his head, he bent down, slipped the smoothly shimmering evening gown down off the girl's satiny shoulders, placed his ear against her softly molded breast. "She's—dead!"

Peters had turned on the boudoir lamp, and was beside him, staring down at the body. Idly he picked up an arm, let it fall back limply. And it seemed to him that although the flesh was cold it was not the cold of clean, human death. Rather it was the cold of unnamable horror, of something that invoked revulsion, of uncleanness—of uncleanness in beauty.

"Not dead," he croaked, "but undead. See—the red in her lips, the smile on her cheeks? A corpse lies flat, sags down like a bundle of rags. But she looks as though she might open her eyes and speak to us."

"Catalepsy," Ethredge muttered. "We must get a doctor. She's too young to die—and too beautiful."

Peters' eyes were hard. "Not catalepsy. Get a mirror!" He turned, looked about the room. And then he gasped.

There was not a mirror in all that place of luxury!

"Commissioner," he said slowly, then, "will you believe me if I show you proof?"

Gravely, Ethredge nodded.

"Then ring for the elevator. Go out and get a mirror. Bring it back here." He sat down on the edge of the bed without a glance at the statuesque beauty lying, evening dress disheveled, so close beside him.

The sound of Ethredge's footsteps receded from the room. . . .

Peters' eyes returned, fascinated, to the girl's face.

"I wonder who she—was?" he asked

W. T.—5

himself somberly. He studied her face more intently, and the sheer beauty of her almost took his breath away. Yet it made him uneasy, too; for it was a beauty that he had never seen in any woman in life, a wanton, soulless beauty. And gradually, as Peters became more uneasy, he felt the flesh on his scalp tightening. . . .

And then Ethredge came quietly into the room, crossed over to the bed, stared down at the recumbent figure. He carried a small leather packet; he had had to go, Peters guessed, to a corner drug-store and purchase a combination toilet set to get the mirror. There was a puzzled, intent expression on Ethredge's face.

"Turn on that ceiling light, Peters. I've—I've an idea I've seen this woman before."

Silently Peters watched the Commissioner, beneath the now brilliant illumination, studying that still, beautiful face.

"I know that I've seen her," Ethredge muttered. "But where? She greatly resembles Katharine Grant; only Katharine never had a sister. And of course," he mused, "Katharine's dead."

Abruptly he paused. He had recalled Mary's words, "Recently there's been the silliest story going about that Katharine Grant just pined away and died for love of him."

"Go ahead, Peters," he said, then. "Go ahead with your mirror experiment!"

WITH hands that trembled Peters opened the leather case and extracted a cheap, rectangular mirror. Carefully he placed himself so that the light falling upon the still, siren's face would be reflected at its greatest intensity. . . .

He looked into the mirror. For a moment the expression on his face did not change, but remained taut with anticipatory revulsion, tense as though he steeled

himself against a sight of horror. Surprizingly, then, the sickening dread passed somewhat from his eyes, although his hands still trembled violently. With an odd gesture of finality he passed the mirror to the Commissioner.

"It is not so—horrible as the other," he muttered. "Thank God! How long has the Grant girl been dead?"

"Six—seven months," Ethredge replied.

Peters put a hand on his arm. "Woerz had been dead for twenty years," he mumbled. "It is she. Look for yourself."

As Ethredge looked into that mirror, great beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, the color drained from his face; for, seen in reflection, that face that should have bloomed with petal-like freshness was mottled with great grayish spots, blotched with angry purple. And over the whole face was spread a tinge of saffron, deepening in places almost to the dead brown of dried leaves.

"A face of death," Ethredge whispered. "Of death, preserved from decay by the embalmer's art."

He had dropped the mirror and was staring incredulously at that still face; for once more it was the pallid, faintly tinted face of a sleeping girl!

"Peters!" he asked hoarsely, then, and his voice shook, "what ghastly magic is in that mirror? What law is behind all this?" And, as a macabre thought struck him, "I wonder if this woman would photograph—as she looks in that mirror!"

Doggedly, then, he stood up, his face stern, his body tense.

"Will she remain asleep?" Apprehensively he glanced at the recumbent girl.

"The legends say—until sundown," Peters answered, with horrible conviction.

"Then come. We'll search those other rooms—for Count Woerz!"

20. *In the Vampire's Power*

THE first room Ethredge and Peters searched, exquisitely furnished, was obviously a guest room. And, surprizingly, it contained a mirror, a superb affair set in a heavy bronze frame.

"Our friend the Count must occasionally entertain house guests," Ethredge said significantly. "He is very sure of himself!"

The second room was smaller. Its furnishings were meager; a footman's uniform hung in an otherwise empty closet; the chest drawers revealed only a few odds and ends of soiled clothing.

It was unquestionably the room belonging to the idiot who had admitted Ethredge that first afternoon. . . .

Only two locked doors remained, and with the shattering of the first the search came to an abrupt end. Behind its violated sanctuary, his attenuated, faultlessly dressed figure outstretched upon the counterpane, lay Count Woerz, asleep. . . .

Ethredge crossed the room in swift, noiseless strides; he had glimpsed a square of monogrammed note-paper pinned against Count Woerz's snowy shirt-front. His hand swept downward, ripped the bit of paper from Woerz's breast.

It bore a brief message, written in Count Woerz's crabbed hand, and addressed to Commissioner Ethredge. That stark message read:

Commissioner Ethredge! Do not act with undue precipitance. Communicate with your fiancée. She sleeps. I alone can rouse her.

LEOPOLD WOERZ.

The terse note dropped from Ethredge's fingers. He whirled, looked about the room, saw the telephone set in its recess at the head of the bed. His shaking fingers dialed Mary's familiar number.

Ethredge, frantic, rasped a hoarse command. There was a long, long pause be-

fore at last the maid's voice, full of a strange, new fear, came back over the wire.

But Ethredge heard only the first words of her hysterical babble. The receiver had fallen from his fingers as from a bundle of nerveless sticks.

"Peters!" His agonized cry split through the room. "He's done something to Mary!" His eyes, bleak and suddenly cruel, stared down at the Count. "But I'm staying here until he awakes—if it takes a million years!"

21. *The Vampires Awake*

TWILIGHT had come to the world beyond that apartment. And, in the instant of the sun's setting, Count Woerz had come awake!

The hiss of Peters' sharply indrawn breath warned Ethredge. As he turned, startled, he caught the spasmodic fluttering, the lifting of the sleeper's eyelids.

From the very second of waking Count Woerz's eyes were bright with complete comprehension, were calm with—was it contempt?

As if savoring to the uttermost his return to consciousness he seemed content momentarily to lie there without a gesture, with only the steady burning gaze of his eyes proclaiming the awakening of the unholy life within him. But then, slowly, his lips writhed in a thin smile.

"I expected you, Commissioner," he said, the calm, quiet words dripping menace. "I foresaw that you would come here. The fact that I am alive attests your chivalry. You found, of course, that all was not well with Mary, and now you wait, puzzling how you may force me to free her. Or, perhaps, you would bargain with me. Well, I listen."

Ethredge, like an avenging doom, looming over that great bed, opened his lips to speak. In that split second, warned

by a red flash of triumph in Woerz's eyes, he wheeled, saw the downward sweep of a bludgeon against Peters' skull, heard the sickening crunch of metal against flesh and bone. The girl was leaping toward him; Count Woerz's animalesque chauffeur was rising from Peters' unconscious body. The girl was upon him, a raging, rending, demoniac fury. He threw up his hands to ward her off, felt his arms seized from behind by Count Woerz's hands, like talons of steel. And then the brutish chauffeur towered above him, the bludgeon that had beaten Peters down upraised.

God! He, too, was undead! His writhing lips were blood-red!

And then consciousness exploded in a crashing inferno of cascading light and swooping darkness. . . .

22. *Mary Disappears*

ETHREDGE, struggling upward through interminable layers of torture-filled darkness, awoke to brain-shattering pain. As the swirling mists began to clear from before his eyes he realized that he lay sprawled across Count Woerz's bed; on the crimson and gold rug Peters was trying, with excruciating slowness, to drag himself to his feet.

Ethredge saw Peters' blood-smeared face turn painfully toward him. "God, Peters," he muttered thickly, "they——" And then he remembered. Mary!

To the telephone, reeling, stumbling—to hear from the distant lips of an obviously relieved maid that Miss Roberts had roused, dressed, and, dismissing the sorely puzzled physician who was already in attendance, departed the house. . . .

Ethredge softly set the telephone back in its cradle and turned to Peters, who had dragged himself to his feet and was now clinging, swaying like a drunken man, to the bedpost.

"Peters," he said hollowly, "she's gone!" But Peters' haggard eyes told him that he already guessed.

"We've got to find her!"

"We've got to find—both of them!" Peters grimly corrected.

But where to look? How to begin the search? Those were unanswerable questions. It was already obvious to Ethredge and Peters that the Count and his grisly retinue had fled, permanently. Nothing that had been left behind hinted where they might have gone.

Doggedly the Commissioner utilized the police teletype, ordered the exhumation of Katharine Grant's body. Behind the gloomy gray walls at Police Headquarters, with the whole machinery of the law in operation, he waited impatiently, together with Peters, for the break.

As the fruitless minutes slowly became hours, desperate yet powerless to act, they reviewed, over and over again, from every angle, the incredible case.

One inexplicable circumstance puzzled them. Time after time they returned to it, as though they sensed that in its solution lay an important key to the mystery.

Why had Count Woerz appeared at Mrs. Moore's bazar? Why had he spent that hour in the Tent of the Past, the Present, and the Future?

23. *Aboard the Yacht Cynthia*

THE hours passed. . . . Word came from Rosedale Cemetery that Katharine Grant's grave had been opened. The vault had been despoiled; the casket was empty. . . .

The big, ugly clock set high on the wall above the Commissioner's desk slowly ticked away the minutes; it was long past midnight. The night crept onward into the small hours. The city slept.

"Peters! Peters!" Ethredge reiterated, again and again, his hands knotting and

unclasping helplessly, "if we could only know *why* Woerz played the fortune-teller at Mrs. Moore's bazar, when in all other things he attempts to appear normal, inconspicuous! What supremely important mission brought him there?"

And then he remembered. That slender, dark man with the livid scar on his left cheek. . . .

"Peters!" he rasped. "That night at the bazar—while you were sick—when I went to get whisky for you, I saw a man come from the gipsy tent—a man who didn't seem dazed, a man who seemed singularly unaffected. Why didn't that man react as the others had done? Why, Peters? Can it be because Woerz didn't attempt to read his mind at all; can it be because business of a different nature was transacted within the security of that tent?"

Peters leaped to his feet. "Eichelman's pearls!" he shouted. "Describe the man, Commissioner!" And with the Commissioner's word-picture he nodded.

"Beniati," he said. "Without a doubt, Angelo Beniati." He smiled his satisfaction. "One of the cleverest fences in the world. Too bad you didn't recognize him." He frowned, puzzled. "But—the Moores! What brings the Moores into the picture? Influence? Beniati does not need influence, except, perhaps, in getting from country to country."

Ethredge's clenched fist crashed against the desk.

"Moore's yacht!"

Peters' eyes were glowing with fierce exultation as he slowly rose. "Moore's yacht!" he echoed. "The explanation! Beniati and those pearls are aboard Moore's yacht, bound for some foreign port where the string can be broken up and sold."

Ethredge had seized the telephone. "The harbor commission!"

The information he sought was easily

obtained. Weston B. Moore's yacht, the *Cynthia*, had passed quarantine at eight-forty p. m. . . .

Ethredge's eyes swept the face of the clock; his lips moved silently as he made a swift calculation.

"Eight hours!" he whispered. "Eight hours' start, and that yacht can do twenty-four knots! And they're headed for any port at all on the face of the earth. But Woerz is aboard. That is a certainty. Otherwise Beniati would have put to sea earlier in the day. When Woerz saw you at the bazar he became frightened. He held Beniati in port. That yacht meant—escape!"

He towered erect, his face stony with resolution. "I'm chartering a seaplane, Peters, if I can get a pilot who'll fly me! I'm going after them!"

His hands swept up the telephone.

"I'm flying a circle over the Atlantic until I cross their path!"

Peters' fingers lightly caressed the service automatic at his hip. "Boy! I'm going with you!" he shouted.

24. *The Pursuit of the Cynthia*

THE long rays of the setting sun lay across the water, extending far into the east in a broad band of gold. Already the sky was perceptibly purpling; within half an hour the sun would set.

Through five tedious, racking hours an antedated amphibian had plunged into the north and east, her pilot-owner grimly intent on every motor sound, Ethredge and Peters watching every smudge of smoke that showed in all that expanse of water below.

They were almost five hundred miles from the nearest land.

Quietly Ethredge spoke.

"The seeing won't last much longer, Peters. In the east it's blurry, and in the

west the sun's blinding." He touched the pilot's shoulder. "Charley!"

The pilot, a fanatically earnest young man who had known very well that in taking this charter he was also taking his life in his hands, looked up.

"Swing to the south; cut across the steamship lanes. Keep her that way until the seeing's gone."

Obediently the young man, without a change of expression, kicked right rudder. Low down on the horizon, the magnified ball that was the sun swung from a position slightly to the right of their tail to a new station, its glow lancing along the right wing. The clouds shifted.

The dry, thunderous roar of twin Wasp motors; three men, taut with strain; the great bowl of the ocean; the slowly sinking furnace of the sun!

The sun's edge was a finger's breadth above the water when Ethredge saw the thin plume of black smoke, like a tiny, sooty feather, standing on the horizon far to the south.

"Give her the gun, Charley; there's a ship ahead!"

The dry beat of the motors increased; the miles vanished beneath the speeding amphibian in an unheeding desert of watery waste; the sooty feather became a long streamer of coal-smoke marching across an arc of ocean. A wobegone tramp steamer climbed into view beneath the pillar of smoke, the red lead on her belly showing at intervals in the slow heave of the sea.

Charley, the young pilot who that day was gambling his life against the dollars that would buy him an infinitesimal interest in some perky little airline, sent the plane skimming the long rollers in the lee of the tramp, which lay supine, the smoke lazily drifting from one rusted funnel, waiting. The plane settled, bit into the slowly heaving waves, bounced along in a shower of spray.

Ethredge, climbing out upon a wing, hailed a man in a vizored cap who leaned over the bridge of the tramp, a man with stubby whiskers who sucked an unlighted pipe.

"Have you sighted a yacht, white, one funnel, the *Cynthia*?"

"*Cynthia? Cynthia?* Didn't catch the name, but we sartinly crossed a white yacht a bit back. Boilin' along nice, too."

But Ethredge was executing a fantastic sort of dance on the broad wing of the plane. "You're the *Nancy Moran*, out of Baltimore?" he yelled. "You'll get a gold watch from me for this, captain!"

The plane was swinging about, lumbering into the wind. Ethredge had disappeared within the cabin.

"Damned fools!" the captain of the *Nancy Moran* commented, as he watched the plane lift and dwindle into the east.

25. A Stratagem

ETHREDGE and Peters, twelve thousand feet above the tremendous circle of ocean, simultaneously sighted the *Cynthia*, a tiny white arrowhead at the apex of miles of wake.

Ethredge was feverishly writing a message. Finished, he taped it about the handle of a wrench.

"That should bring Beniati up short," Peters gloated.

"I don't know," Ethredge replied somberly. "Beniati knows that we have no authority on the high seas."

The amphibian screamed downward; the white arrowhead grew from a toy ship to a millionaire's plaything, a faint eddy of superheated air from her Diesel motors visible above her single pearly funnel. The amphibian roared across the knife-like prow of the yacht; the weighted note hurtled downward, bounded along the deck. A dark, scarred man

was running from the bridge to pick it up. Beniati!

The plane was swinging about in a wide circle. The men on the *Cynthia's* bridge were arguing.

"The captain wants to stop the ship, and Beniati won't let him," Peters guessed. "Who'll win? The captain's master, but Beniati has authority from Moore. . . ."

Minutes passed. And the *Cynthia*, her bows rising and falling slightly as she knifed through the greenish seas, plowed stubbornly ahead.

The muscles along Ethredge's jaws were ribbed, hard as rock.

"Charley." There was a curious, eager resonance in his voice. "Do you think you can set us down across that yacht's bows so that she'll have to run us down?"

The stripling pilot looked up briefly. "It can be done." A half-smile flickered across his face.

Musingly Ethredge went on, "Most ship captains are pretty fine. . . . We'll take the chance. And twenty thousand dollars to you, my lad—all the money I can raise in the world—if we see shore alive. *Put her down!*"

The boy piloting that plane licked his lips. Lower and lower the plane settled, until she was only a scant forty feet above the long green billows. And then she struck, lifted, struck again in a shower of spume. She was plowing ahead heavily, directly across the *Cynthia's* bows.

Charley, the pilot, cut his motors, leaped to escape the cabin.

In the sudden silence Ethredge and Peters, standing on the wing, could hear, plainly, the clang of the engine-room telegraph as the *Cynthia's* captain tried to swerve his ship. But the momentum of the heavy yacht was too great. A rushing wall of white, the incoherent sound of shouting men, and then came the crash,

the dry snapping of propeller blades, the crunching groan of a crushed wing.

The little amphibian had suddenly vanished.

Three men, swimming in the Atlantic, and a white yacht slowly moving away.

But, ahead, the forward momentum of the *Cynthia* was slowly halting. Water turgidly boiling at her stern told that her engines had been reversed.

The *Cynthia's* captain was showing himself a man.

26. *The Horror on the Yacht*

ARAGING, fuming captain confronted the three dripping men as they were hauled aboard the *Cynthia*. And behind him stood another man, sleek, slender, with a scarred face. Beniati!

"Police!" Ethredge snapped, cutting short the captain's bellows. With a flick of his wrist he displayed his badge. "That man is an international jewel thief!"

"It's a lie!" Beniati screamed. His hand flashed within his coat, and appeared again clutching an ugly automatic.

With the speed of a striking serpent the *Cynthia's* captain's fist crashed against the gun, sent it skidding twenty feet down the deck. Beniati was rubbing his numbed wrist.

"You can't arrest me," he whimpered. "We're at sea. You have no authority here!"

The captain turned suddenly to his mate. "Lock him in his cabin," he ordered brusquely. "This may cost me my job, but I'm going to get to the bottom of whatever's wrong. Your credentials, sir?"

Beniati, cursing and protesting, was led away. . . .

Tersely, after he had identified himself, Ethredge snapped, "I want a list of your passengers. We are interested, par-

ticularly, in a tall, thin gentleman who came aboard last night just before you sailed. He is very probably sleeping."

Captain Halliday started. "Odd! But—Count Woerz; he is a nobleman—Count Woerz and his party are strange people, Commissioner. They remained in the lounge until almost daylight, and only went to their cabins at dawn; excepting, however, Count Woerz's servant, who retired early and who has been, you might say, guarding those cabins since sunrise. It is—peculiar. . . ."

When Ethredge spoke his voice was hoarse and strange.

"Captain Halliday," he said slowly, "you have seen our credentials. We wish, now, to be shown to those cabins—and left alone."

Peters was examining his service automatic, which, as he had slipped from the wing of the foundering plane into the sea, he had protected as well as he could by holding it above his head. "All right, Commissioner," he said then, quietly. "Let's go."

COUNT WOERZ'S suite was abaft the lounge. There was a large living-room facing the afterdeck, two master staterooms facing, respectively, to port and to starboard. Captain Halliday rapped briskly at the central door.

A moment's silence, and a guttural voice asked, "Who's dere?"

"Captain Halliday. Open the door, please."

There was a long silence. Captain Halliday was whispering, "He came aboard yesterday morning, with baggage. He seems not too bright."

The hesitating shuffle of footsteps beyond the door. "You vill not come vithin?" the guttural voice asked, querulously. "I haf orders no one to admit."

"I will not come inside," Captain Halliday said soothingly.

The door opened a few inches, and the vacuous, blond face of the man who had first admitted Ethredge to Woerz's apartment appeared. There was a guttural imprecation.

But Peters' foot was in the crack; Ethredge's shoulder was against the panel. The door burst wide; a scuffle, a click, and the pudgy, blond idiot was in handcuffs. He had begun to tremble.

Peters pushed him through the door. "Put him in some safe place, captain," he snapped. "He's harmless, poor devil!"

The door closed. . . .

"Mary!"

Ethredge was leaping across that spacious cabin toward a vast mauve overstuffed chair above which he had glimpsed the warm brown halo of a woman's hair.

"Mary! Oh Heaven!"

He had come close to her, had grasped her hands, was looking down with growing horror into her eyes which, wide open, stared through him with glassy intentness at the sea beyond the long window and the snowy rail.

"Hypnosis!" His anguished cry seared through the cabin.

"Ethredge!" It was Peters' voice, harsh, warning. Ethredge whirled. The door of one of the staterooms was softly opening.

Three persons came through that door—two men and a woman. The men were Count Woerz and his chauffeur; the girl was Katharine Grant!

The sun had set.

Through a single horrible instant all five stood tableausque; only Mary, staring blindly over the twilight-shrouded ocean, did not tense. In that moment the beat of the engines seemed to Ethredge and Peters like the pounding of giant sledges upon mountains of metal.

Ethredge's right hand had slipped with-

in his breast; Count Woerz's chauffeur had moved with pantherine quickness to a position commanding the door; Katharine Grant, wistfully girlish-looking in flaring white trousers and sports jacket had, with seeming unconcern, seated herself in one of the deep lounge chairs and was quietly watching Ethredge; Count Woerz himself had not moved.

Rage like a hot, thin fire and a something, too, that may have been fear were in Count Woerz's voice as he spoke.

"I had not expected you to follow me here, Commissioner Ethredge. You are more brilliant than I supposed. I should have killed you. Yet—your sweetheart sleeps. I offer you terms."

Ethredge stood motionless, his chin sunk on his breast. Then, "To hell with your terms!" he said softly. "If Mary could know, she would have me do as I am doing. I am going to kill you!" His fist, within his coat, had suddenly knotted.

Count Woerz smiled thinly. "Your gun is useless," he said significantly. "But now—guard the door, Sebastian!"

He sprang, his fingers outstretched like the talons of some ghastly bird of prey. Ethredge's hand flicked from his coat with the speed of light.

"Not a gun, Woerz!" he hissed, "*but the dagger that killed Eichelman!*" The knife gleamed dully through a swift lunging arc.

Woerz had swerved desperately, trying to halt his plunging rush—too late. The knife ripped down through his coat, shearing his arm from shoulder to elbow.

Woerz reeled back. His eyes were suddenly glaring redly, hot with fear, like the eyes of a trapped beast. Blood gushed from his wounded arm, down across his reddening fingers, to the rug.

"Sebastian," he gasped. "The knife!"

The ape-like chauffeur lunged, evaded Ethredge's thrust with simian agility; his

fingers gripped the Commissioner's wrist, twisted. The blood-tipped knife dropped to the floor.

Woerz chuckled, a sound of unutterable evil and horror. Swiftly he stooped to pick up the dagger. And in that instant he staggered, slumped to his knees, an expression of incredulous amazement and mortal fear on his face.

A spot of crimson had jutted abruptly upon his left breast!

Behind Ethredge, Peters' automatic was barking; two shots in rapid succession. Count Woerz's chauffeur spun drunkenly as the slugs jerked into his body, then reeled and pitched forward on his face.

Katharine Grant, her face a nightmare of unhuman hate, had leaped from her chair and was springing across the few feet that separated her from Peters. She never crossed that strip of rug.

Aiming at her softly youthful breast with the calmness of one who practises target shooting, Peters, an expression of unutterable pain in his eyes, sent a single shot into her heart.

In that instant the room was full of a scream of terror. Ethredge and Peters whirled.

That scream had come from Mary's throat!

For Mary was awake. She stood there swaying, her face white with horror and bewilderment.

"Charles! Charles!" she gasped. "Behind you!"

She had fainted. The sounds of pounding, of excited oaths came through the door.

Ethredge turned, to open the door—and clutched his throat while his senses reeled.

On that superb rug lay the dehydrated body, the formaldehyde-saturated body of a girl many months dead; her complexion

purpled and saffron, her cheeks sunken, her half-opened eyes masses of putrefaction. And, a few feet away, the clothes lying loosely about them, a gray pus mingled with red blood dribbling from naked bones, lay two skeletons.

Peters, his face ashen, was moaning inanely, "God! How can I tell Maggie that I had the ballistics boys melt up her solid silver spoons!"

27. *Buried at Sea*

THE moon, two hand-breadths above the eastern rim of the world, sent her rays lancing across the black ocean, transforming the *Cynthia's* wake into a silvered, enchanted roadway. The heavens were a lake of stars.

Ethredge, Peters, and Mary Roberts sat close together on the *Cynthia's* afterdeck. They were warmly bundled in greatcoats, for it was close to midnight and the night was unseasonably cold. They were conversing in low tones, with long silences. Their faces, white in the moonlight, still showed traces of the horror that had been.

"And so," Peters said softly, "the Eichelman case is solved."

He lifted the fabulously valuable string of pearls from their box, lying on a table at his elbow, let them gleam and shimmer in the moonlight for a moment before putting them down. "Too bad you can't keep these for Mary, Charles."

"Yes," Ethredge laughed. "And the other jewels, and the bonds. But those things all go to Eichelman's estate."

He was silent for a moment.

"Mary and I don't need Eichelman's pearls to be—happy."

She lifted his hand between her warm little fingers, touched it gently with her lips. Silence, like a canopy of friendship, fell upon the three. . . .

"Yes," Peters mused, after a little time

had passed, "it's best that we—buried them at sea. No one would ever believe."

"No," Ethredge agreed. "Only those aboard this yacht will ever know what really happened. They will be silent."

Peters laughed dryly. "They'd be afraid people'd think them soft-headed," he said, with sage wisdom.

Ethredge drew Mary's head closer down against his shoulder.

"It's best that the Grants never know that we opened—Katharine's grave," he mused. "Too bad, of course, that we can't prosecute Beniati and Moore."

"Well, we can't," Peters said flatly. "We'd be ridiculed out of town."

The old, whimsical smile flickered across Ethredge's face.

"Yes," he admitted. "About all we can do is put that poor devil of a servant of Woerz's in some comfortable asylum. Funny that Woerz would use an idiot."

Peters shook his head. "He *had* to use an idiot. No sane man could have worked for him without instinctively feel-

ing what he was. That idiot was a peasant—someone Woerz probably took from his own estate as a child."

Ethredge was squinting at the moon. "Nice moon tonight, Peters," he said, presently.

Peters grinned and rose. "Well," he said, "I can take a hint. Guess I'll get the steward to bring some of Moore's Scotch to my cabin. It isn't often that I have a chance to raid a millionaire's liquor. Good-night—Charles—Mary. . . ."

The sound of his footsteps receded down the deck. The steady thud of the engines, the rush of water against the hull, the whisper of the night wind, were a monotony of sound that might have been designed by the gods as an accompaniment to love. The moon was riding higher in the heavens; the ocean was flecked and banded with silver.

Ethredge turned to his sweetheart, looked down into her moon-bathed face. His lips touched her mouth; his arms went about her shoulders.

He drew her close. . . .

[THE END]

