

TERROR TALES



Volume Eight

July-August, 1937

Number One

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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

FOUR LONG, FASCINATING MYSTERY-TERROR NOVELETTES

- Satan's Love Bazaar**.....By Wayne Rogers 6
 Could the baleful influence of that shaggy, unclean hex-man have turned our peaceful charity fair into a mad orgy where our loveliest young girls vied savagely with one another to flaunt their secret charms in lewd display? Could that strange power make me commit a hideous murder? . . .
- Lovely Lady of Death**.....By Donald Dale 38
 As a wedding present for my bride I bought a dainty figurine. . . I didn't know it was the goddess of a shapeless monster that would spill the life blood of my loved ones—and hurl me through the gamut of nameless horror and despair! . . .
- Revels for the Lusting Dead**.....By Arthur Leo Zagat 66
 Linda Loray had a date to be married—but not to a mad fiend who conducted midnight revels where naked girl-gladiators entertained eerie spectators who were dead men lusting for the sight of fresh, warm blood!
- Dance of the Bloodless Ones**.....By Francis James 98
 If you are in love—beware! Guard the girl of your choice with your very life! For at this very instant, obscene, poisonous beings may be coveting your happiness—and gloating over the intimate beauties of your loved one!

BLOOD-CHILLING SHORT TALES OF TERROR

- I Am A Mad Artist!**.....By H. T. Sperry 28
 Why did that lovely creature insist upon posing nude for me—when she knew that the sight of her body would awake in me the killer-beast that was my heritage?
- The Thing Without A Name**.....By Ray Cummings 56
 It never occurred to Nada Parks that a gruesome thing long dead could command the love of some one young and flush with beauty—until she found herself locked up with The Thing Without A Name!
- Moulder of Monsters**.....By G. T. Fleming-Roberts 87
 Not words, but some unearthly, urgent whimpering, came over the phone and led young Dr. Hedson and his beautiful nurse to the laboratory where men were changed to monsters!

—AND—

- Religion of Terror**.....The Editor 4
 There are those who make a god of pain!
- Black Chapel**.....A Department 121

Cover Painting by John A. Coughlin

Story Illustrations by Monroe Eisenberg and Hamilton Greene

Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary; Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter May 27, 1936, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1937, by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 15c. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. \$7.50. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

MOULDER of MONSTERS

By
G. T. Fleming - Roberts

(Author of "The House in Hell," etc.)



Unsuspecting, young Dr. Frank Hedson answered a weird, pleading call that led him and his beautiful assistant into a hellish laboratory where human beings were twisted into gibbering, raving idiots—for a hideous display. . . .

THE telephone receiver slipped from her fingers. It dropped eight inches to the plate glass that covered Dr. Frank Hedson's desk, tipped over, and rolled until it struck a heavy paper-knife. Her hand went up toward her head, flut-

tered a moment at the back of her neck where an icy chill played with the wisps of fine, gold hair. She could not drag her blue-eyed gaze from the phone receiver.

The voice was still there—the voice that spoke not words, but gave forth

muted croakings that were loathsome and hideous—yet filled with pleading.

Frank Hedson came out of his tiny pharmacy which was attached to his consultation room. A bottle of pills that he intended to drop at the home of one of his patients, on the way to the theater, rattled in his pocket. His whistling lips groped vaguely for a tune.

"That the phone, Flo?" Dr. Hedson asked. Then, as Flo Martin turned around, her fingers gripping the edge of the desk, the doctor's smooth, hard jaw muscles tightened perceptibly. His big body moved quickly across the office. He pounced upon the phone. "That damned masher trying to date you again? I'll date him for a sock in the nose!"

"No," Flo whispered. "It isn't that. It's—" She shook her head bewilderedly.

As Dr. Hedson listened intently, his unruly eyebrows converged in a puzzled frown. His dark eyes became the shiny darkness of the telephone receiver in his hand.

Flo pressed close to him. Her white fingers hooked into the substantial muscles beneath the sleeve of his coat. The muted croakings had stopped and in its place was a meaningless, metallic clattering.

Frank Hedson jerked at Flo: "Morse code, I think, and it doesn't mean a thing to me. Someone is in so much pain he can't speak. Maybe dying. Get out the car. Best bet is to have this call traced." Then he said into the transmitter: "Can't understand that tapping . . . Hello. Try speaking again."

Flo picked the doctor's trench coat from the rack and pulled it over her severe white uniform. She smiled a little in spite of the agitation within her. It was an old coat that smelled of tobacco and rubber. It fitted her like a tent. But it was thoroughly reliable and proof against stormy weather. A lot like Frank Hedson that way. So she loved wearing the old thing.

She ran down into the garage in the basement of the building. It was dark down there, and she hurried about getting the light on. Then she pushed back the wide doors that opened on the concrete incline that slanted to the street level. Mist rolled into the garage in sluggish, grey billows. Grotesque, flacid creatures of mist moved unalterably forward to take a clammy grip of everything in the garage. Her pulse quickened. As a little girl she had been told that there were monsters in the mist. She had never quite got over that childish fancy.

She got into the shiny sedan, turned the key, and plugged at the starter. The starter cranked and cranked but the motor wouldn't kick over. She tried again, and still no results. Nothing to do but trot across the street and get Henry Crowe. She got out of the car, ran up the incline. It was like climbing to the pinnacle of a mountain, somewhere among the clouds. Distant street lamps were dingy and incompetent. Directly across the street, Henry Crowe's neon garage sign created a little aura of demoniacal red in the fog. Flo held the collar of the doctor's coat up close about her throat and ran across the street.

SHE went into Henry Crowe's office. There was no one there. Crowe owned the garage and slept there on a cot with a telephone a little way from him. Like a doctor, he gave twenty-four hour service. He had always wanted to be a doctor for that matter. Would have been one, too, had it not been for that accident that had burned one of his hands so badly he always kept it hidden with a white glove.

"Henry!" Flo cried. "Henry Crowe! Where are you?" She listened for footsteps. Somewhere in the vast garage building a door slid open. She saw a white figure running across the repair shop. Crowe came into the office on the run.

He wore immaculate white overalls. His dark red hair was slicked back neatly. He was grinning boyishly. A year older than Frank Hedson, he somehow kept himself looking five years younger. He nipped the sleeve of the coat Flo wore, with his right hand—the hand that wasn't gloved. His grin slashed across his freckled face. "I'm a soothsayer, Flo, and I say that Frank didn't take my advice and replace that automatic choke."

"I don't know what he didn't replace, Henry, but the car won't start and this is an emergency." She was talking to Crowe while Crowe darted into the shop and came back with a tool bag that was as neat as a doctor's satchel. Then he grabbed Flo's arm and steered her into the mist.

"Nasty night for a death-bed session," he said. "Too bad Frank won't get it through his head that a car can go wrong just like a human body."

They went down into the doctor's garage that the mist had made as mysterious as a subterranean cavern. Henry yanked up the hood, balanced a flashlight on the motor, and pulled the cap from the automatic choke mounted on the manifold. A thin piece of metal dropped out. He grunted, tossed the choke cap aside. "Thermostat burned clear off. Frank will have to let me take him in old Betsy. Wait until I lock the garage, and I'll be right over." Then his white figure vanished in the blur of light.

Frank Hedson came into the garage. He was carrying Flo's coat and a satchel. His frown had turned into one of anxiety. "That call came from a warehouse down on the river front," he said. "Shouldn't be anyone there at all at this time of the night. Queer." Then he looked at the car. "Wait, didn't you leave the motor running?"

"It won't run," Flo told him. "A gadget is burned off."

"Damn," he said quietly. "Have to go get Henry."

A car roared at the top of the doctor's inclined driveway. Flo said: "That's Henry now. He'll take you with him, wherever you want to go. If you're going down toward the river, I'll ride with you. It's only a few blocks from my place, you know."

"A heck of a neighborhood," Dr. Hedson said as he strode up the incline.

"Telling me?"

Henry looked surprised as Flo started to get in beside him. He grinned. "This is a charming pick-up. Squeeze in, Doc. What'd I tell you about that choke?"

"Yeah," Hedson growled. "You're a better diagnostician about engines than I am about human beings. Step on it, Henry."

"What kind of a case?" Henry asked.

Hedson looked at Flo, queerly. Then he filled in an uncomfortable pause with a laugh. "Some of the old medical spirit rising to the surface, Henry? Better stick to cars. They don't balk at diets and nasty medicine."

"Guess you're right," Henry said quietly. And whatever else he was saying was lost in the roar of the old car's motor as they accelerated up the street.

MIST was born at the river. On Front Street, the atmosphere was all but impenetrable. Henry's yellow fog light picked out the holes in the brick pavement and he staggered the car along to avoid them. He had cranked the window down in the hope of gaining better visibility. The fog rolled in through the opening and its grey, gelid fingers found Flo's throat and choked, choked.

The tires of the car scuffed the low, worn curb in front of a low, black building. The engine died and there was no sound in the grey, ubiquitous night except the lap of the river against the old wooden bulkhead. Flo coughed. Dr. Hedson gripped his bag and got out.

"Wait," Henry said. And Dr. Hedson

waited. There wasn't a sign of light in the warehouse or the little office attached. Henry dug out a flashlight from the door pocket. "There have been too many doctors walking off into the night lately," Henry said.

Flo and Frank knew what Crowe meant. Six medical men had walked off into the night within the past six months. They hadn't come back.

Frank Hedson grunted. "I can take care of myself, even if I haven't sense enough to take care of my car." But he didn't object when Henry got out, flashlight in hand.

"Well, you're not going to leave me alone, that's certain," Flo said. She laughed uneasily. No, she didn't ever want to be alone on a night like this. They were stealthy monsters, these creatures of the mist. And their touch was cold. She crowded in between the two men and Frank's arm was welcome as it curled about her waist.

"Don't know what we'll find inside here," he whispered. "It couldn't talk. May be some sort of ghastly mess."

She didn't care. It would be human. The monsters of the mist weren't human. She was glad when the door of the warehouse office closed behind them. That would keep the fog out.

But it didn't. The fog came in just the same; crawled through cracks in the floor and beneath the door. Persistently, it mounted guard, became a legion of grey phantoms of ever changing shape that quenched Henry's light until it was as feeble as a jaundice patient and just as yellow.

Henry's light splashed across a worn desk. There a telephone had been upset. Flo pressed close to Frank Hedson. "Blood," she whispered. "On the floor." Across the dirty boards, blood smeared a trail that led to a door at the end of the room. Hedson took the light from Henry's hand and started toward the door.

From the next room came queer, strangling sounds and another sound that was like the body of a huge fish thrashing around in the bottom of a boat.

At the door of the next room, the trio paused. The light in Hedson's hand fingered through the gloom, splashed across something that was white and naked, and spotted with blood; splashed upon a shaky, misplaced head, a horribly-blank face and a bloody slash of a mouth that seemed to be way down where the breast ought to be.

Hedson swung around. Light fell on Henry Crowe and Flo Martin. Hedson's face was chalk-like. "Get Flo out of here!" he shouted hoarsely.

And Crowe, sick and stumbling like a green frosh in a college dissecting room, put arms around Flo and tried to draw her back. The thrashing, flopping sound was furiously redoubled. Dr. Hedson gave Flo a shove that backed both Crowe and the girl into the office. Then he turned into the room where horror dwelt.

Through the fog-filled room, the yellow light hunted, caught the naked thing as it flopped and rolled toward the end of the room where the grey of the mist deepened. It might have been called a man, once. It was loose-jointed and shaky as a new born calf. It crawled on bloody elbows and knees, or fell flat on its belly when its very bones seemed to bend beneath it.

"Stop!" ordered Hedson.

But the thing didn't stop. It rolled and flopped along and the doctor's curiously leaden legs dragged him after it. At the end of the room was a ragged blot of blackness in the floor, like a pit of some sort. Hedson saw the thing roll sideways over the edge, cling for a moment to the rim. He leaped, dropped to his knees, tried to clutch at a hand that had a limp, dead-fish feeling. Then the thing dropped through the opening. Cold water drenched the doctor's face. He turned his light into

a depth of churning, black, river water, beheld again that white, expressionless face, so hideously soft and boneless looking.

THE floor boards cracked and bent beneath Hedson's weight. The high water that had been so prevalent that spring had rotted the floor at this end of the building. The monstrous thing was down there, somewhere in the black water. Bubbles gurgled to the little patch of surface and burst there. The thing had been alive. But for God's sake what kind of creature was it? Had it been the thing that had phoned Hedson's office? Why, then, had it run away?

He stumbled back to where Henry and Flo awaited him. He took the girl's arm with one hand and Henry's with the other. "Let's get out of here," he said. And the huskiness of his voice made it seem as if those fingers of mist had him by the throat, too.

"Dead," Frank Hedson told them as Henry started the car.

"But—but what was it?" Flo whispered.

Hedson ran a big hand across a moist, chill brow. He shook his head. "No idea."

"It was like a man," Henry said. "Yet it wasn't either. More like a human squid."

"But aren't you going to the police?" Flo asked.

"Get you home first. . . . Two squares north, Henry."

Flo Martin had a small apartment over a hardware store. As Hedson said, it wasn't a particularly nice neighborhood. Hedson didn't like the girl living there, but there wasn't anything he could do about it until his practice picked up. He took her up the dark stairway. The mist-creatures were there, too, but beyond her door the living warmth of soft-shaded lamps shut out all that was cold and grey and dead.

He kissed her that shy, embarrassed

way he always did and hurried down the steps where Henry awaited him in his old wreck of a coupe. Flo didn't have a very nice outlook from her front windows, he thought. There was a pool room, the Cozy Coney Island Lunch, a double-feature movie house, a few shops that were dark at night, and something else. A new industry had moved in where a large grocery had failed. The front of the place was garishly lighted, and there was a big canvas sign reading: "Museum of Freaks and Mammoth Menagerie."

Henry noticed Frank Hedson looking at this dime museum. "Must be a new place," he said as he started his car.

"Yes," Hedson said slowly. "They ought to have that nightmare we found in the warehouse. I—" He forgot what he was going to say. Standing at the door of the museum, bowing to the curious patrons as they went inside, was a sleek-haired man who looked as if poured into a dark, pin-striped suit. Hedson pushed open the door of the coupe.

"Matter?" asked Henry Crowe.

Hedson's jaw muscles were tight. "Know that fellow over there? The one who seems to be running that freak show, and possibly the universe, judging from the conceited look on his face?"

Crowe shook his head.

"Well, I don't either!" Hedson snapped. "Don't want to know him, but he's the same Johnny who has been pestering Flo every time she comes home. Look at the sun-tan powder on his face! Trying to catch the sophistication of an explorer with makeup and a smooth line. Told Flo his name was Whit Jennings." Hedson got out and slammed the door of the car. And with black brows drawn together in a thunder-cap scowl, Frank Hedson went across the street, walking fast.

HE TOOK another look at Whit Jennings. The man bowed and smiled at him. Hedson grunted, went over to

the ticket booth and tossed down his dime. He went around the booth so he could walk in front of Jennings. Just inside the entry-way, was a sign. It read: "India Rubber Man."

Hedson turned on his heel. "You!" he thrust the word at Jennings. Jennings bowed his mechanical bow, and Hedson said brusquely: "Where's your India Rubber Man?"

"Unfortunately, I am unable to exhibit him tonight," said the proprietor of the museum, in a velvety voice. "But of all the freaks, he is probably the least important."

Hedson grumbled something and entered the museum. It was a shabby place, even as dime museums go. There was an ancient elephant and a pair of mangy, half-starved wolves. A cage labeled "Man-Eating Panther" was empty. There was the usual collection of animal freaks—five-legged dog, two-headed calf, and similar grotesqueries, probably all faked.

But the human freaks— Never had Hedson seen anything more nauseous, and a medical man sometimes sees some horrible things. And the human freaks weren't fakes.

There was the human spider, a twisted, crippled specimen of humanity, whose long, emaciated limbs looked as though they had been stretched on the rack, so disproportionate were they in comparison with his scrawny body. It was physically impossible for him to walk any other way than on all fours, if he could have walked at all.

And there was about his face that same blank expression that Hedson had met on the face of that monster in the warehouse office.

The mouth of the unfortunate looked as though it had been puckered by means of a thin wire sewed through the lips. It was dressed in nothing but a pair of shorts, and as it moved about its canvas-fenced pen, to the morbid delight of the

onlookers, its crooked, shriveled limbs trembled like wire springs.

In another booth was what was supposed to be a wild man from Borneo. The wild man's skin, where it was visible between patches of long, dark hair that covered its torso, was as white as Hedson's. But the entire body seemed to have been dwarfed by tremendous pressure. Legs were thick, short and bowed. The head was flat. The chest bulged like a wine barrel and distorted ribs seemed on the point of bursting through the skin. The face was lined with scars. Here again, something had been done to the lips. They were turned inside out, giving the whole countenance an expression of hellish glee—and, incidentally, preventing the freak from talking intelligibly.

Frank Hedson turned away, shuddering. He shouldered his way back through the crowd. Whit Jennings, the proprietor, was just entering the room preparatory to giving his thrill-talk before each booth. Hedson caught him by the shoulder and all but yanked him off his feet. "Where do you get your freaks?" he cried.

WHIT JENNINGS' smile seemed pasted on his effeminate lips. "I've searched the world over for the most unusual specimens of mankind. I—"

"Well, I've got another idea!" Hedson's left fist pounded up to the point of Jennings' chin. Jennings went over backwards into the arms of surprised patrons of the museum. An hysterical woman shrieked out: "Murder!" Somewhere out in the street, a cop shrilled his whistle. Hedson jabbed his elbow into the face of a man who would have detained him and rushed from the museum. In spite of repeated calls from the cop to halt, Hedson sprinted on until he saw a cruising taxi. He hopped in and directed the driver to go to his office. . . .

An hour later, Frank Hedson walked into the office of Henry Crowe's garage.

Crowe wasn't in sight, but there was an electric button on the desk, which would summon the garage man at any hour of the night. Then, impatiently, Hedson stepped out into the repair shop. He saw Crowe coming up the basement steps, as he moved alongside of a partially raised hydraulic lift. He waited for Crowe.

The garage man wasn't grinning. His face still wore the sickly hue that had come upon it in the river-front warehouse. He stopped at one end of the lift and asked the doctor what he wanted.

Hedson said: "I've been looking in a closet, and I came across a telegraph key. A boyhood pal of mine and I used to have a telegraph outfit between our houses. That boy was about five years older than I and a lot smarter. When he grew up, he studied medicine and assumed an important post at a certain medical college. His name is Dr. Eric Goelf. Ever hear of him?"

Henry nodded. "Studied anatomy under him. Why?"

"Because," said Hedson slowly, "I saw him tonight. I called up his school and found out that he has been missing for some time. I found out a number of other things I didn't know, and I recalled how he and I worked to learn Morse code when we were kids, telegraphing back and forth. Eric is the only man who would know that once I knew Morse code. He tried to communicate with me tonight by means of the code. He couldn't talk over the phone because someone had done something to his mouth—and to other parts of his anatomy. Henry, that *thing*, that boneless, flopping freak in the warehouse tonight was not only Whit Jennings' escaped India Rubber Man, he was also Dr. Eric Goelf!"

"Well?" Henry waited.

"Henry, *there is nothing wrong with your left hand, is there?*"

Crowe looked down at his gloved left hand. His grin came back, but only to

one side of his mouth. His eyes had a glazed, dead look in them. "No," he said evenly, "there is nothing wrong with my hand."

"No. It wasn't your hand, Henry. It was your brain. Your rotten, filthy brain." Hedson took a step toward Crowe. Crowe rested his hand on the rack of the hydraulic lift. He said: "So you found that out, did you? What are you going to do about it?"

"I think," Hedson said slowly, "I think I'm going to kill you."

Crowe's smile widened. That ought to have warned Hedson, for as the doctor advanced toward Crowe, the garage man simply shoved against the rack of the hydraulic lift. The rack swung around and its heavy steel side member wiped Hedson off his feet with a stunning blow that made a whirling turn-table of the earth. He fought bitterly against unconsciousness and won. But he was all but helpless in a tangle of oil-soaked rope that held his arms and legs. And struggle as he would, Crowe tightened and stretched the ropes with the patience of a spider very sure of its fly.

When he had reinforced his hasty web of rope and made certain that Hedson was unable to escape, Crowe took hold of a free end of rope and dragged the doctor across the garage floor and down a flight of steps. Inhuman shrieks of agony ripped out of the darkness below.

The room below was not unlike any garage basement. But there were heavy steel doors that made privacy a certainty. There were drums of grease and oil and alcohols standing about on shelves to camouflage the jars of chemicals, reagents, and cabinets of instruments which Crowe had accumulated. The shrieks of agony came from a flimsy looking cage where an animated black shadow now and again hurled itself against wire mesh and fell back on the cage floor to rip at its confines with saber-like claws. The creature

was a black panther, probably the cat that Whit Jennings had exhibited in his dime museum. And the brute was utterly blind. Fresh blood streamed from empty eye sockets.

In this basement room were two hydraulic lifts. One of them was occupied by a wooden frame across which was stretched a mummy-like thing, swathed in bloody bandages. The lift had been raised until it engaged a similar frame fixed to the ceiling. The terrific pressure thus exerted was warping the bandage-swathed body into some grotesque shape.

CROWE lugged the helpless doctor to the second hydraulic lift and threw him across the grease rack. Then he loosened that portion of the rope that bound Hedson's arms, but only long enough to secure Hedson's shoulders to the rack. As he bound the doctor, Crowe nodded toward the mummy-thing in the rack at the opposite end of the room.

"Dr. Manfred," he explained. "I studied surgery under Manfred. He was on the committee that examined me, and like the others who were instrumental in my discharge from college, he is paying the price for my disgrace. Remember how he used to always say 'Humph!' Well, he will have a hump that any dromedary might envy, by the time I get through with him.

"My processes are interesting. Vivisection and the grafting of one part of the body to another account for some of the changes. Then again, I inject certain acids into the bony structures. Even as the shell of an egg is rendered soft and plastic by a soaking in vinegar, so my acid reduces bones to something which, when sufficient pressure is exerted, may be warped into any shape. Sometimes, I resort to plastic surgery to gain the proper facial expression, such as you noted in Jennings' wild man, who, by the way, was once Dr. Raymond Gribbon, another

member of that committee which discharged me for 'unethical practice' even before I had a license."

"You're a damned fiend!" Dr. Hedson shouted.

Crowe's face became sullen. "And I might have been a genius had not the narrow mindedness of the medical profession prevented my progress." He slowly withdrew the white glove from his left hand and clenched and unclenched perfectly formed fingers. "While I used the acid burns I received in the laboratory as an excuse for giving up medicine, you see what my advanced knowledge of plastic surgery has done for my hand. I might have helped cripples and paralytics in the same manner, had I been given the chance. But reminiscence is not good for anyone.

"Not so many years ago, a surgeon succeeded in transplanting the eye of a pig into the socket of a human being who had lost an eye. Though the transplanted eye became a part of living tissue, the man was unable to see with it. I am not anxious to replace sight where I shall have taken sight away. But Whit Jennings will pay fifteen hundred dollars for a panther-eyed freak. Ordinarily, I receive only a thousand dollars for my creations."

"And I suppose I'm to be the subject of your experiment," Hedson said.

Crowe smiled queerly. "Whatever led you to believe that?" He moved calmly across the room to the door of a closet. As he passed the panther cage, the blind brute became a black tornado of insane fury. It clawed and bit at the wire mesh in an effort to reach the man who had tormented it. But Crowe passed unscathed. He opened the door of the closet and hauled out a vertical rack on rollers. In the center of the rack was a woman, wrists and ankles securely bound, bright gold hair securely knotted to a horizontal member of the frame, her white, lovely back stripped bare; her eyes were open.

"Flo!" Hedson gasped, yet he could scarcely hear his own voice.

Standing beside the frame, Crowe assumed the attitude of a lecturer. "Before removing the young lady's eyes in order to replace them with those of the panther, I want to make a few changes in the general appearance of her body." He marked points along the girl's spine with a piece of red chalk. "Spinal injections will be made at these points in order to destroy some of the bony tissue of the vertebrae. In that way we shall be able to warp the body into something more nearly resembling that of a panther. Don't look so furious, Hedson. A panther is not an unlovely animal."

Crowe went to a littered work bench, picked up a flask of water. To this he added a teaspoonful of purple powder that was heaped up on the bench. "Potassium permanganate," he explained. "Added to distilled water, it makes an ideal antiseptic with which to bathe that area upon which we are about to operate."

POTASSIUM PERMANGANATE, thought Hedson dully. He looked at the heap of purple powder, lying in the middle of a litter of mechanic's tools, surgeon's instruments, and cotton waste. On the shelf directly above the bench was an open can marked: "Radiator Glycerine." Potassium permanganate and glycerin—there was some connection between the two chemicals in the back of Hedson's brain. Their combination now—was that the trick that had once delighted him in school chemical laboratories?

He watched Crowe prepare the antiseptic solution. If Crowe had stood a little nearer the hydraulic lift, Hedson might have swung the lift around and knocked Crowe down. That was possible, because a piece of old shaft hanging, attached to the low ceiling, was within the reach of Hedson's left hand. But what good would that do? He couldn't hope to knock Crowe out, for the rope that bound his shoulders to the rack prevented him from exerting enough energy to swing the



lift around at sufficient speed so that it might strike a telling blow.

He looked over at Flo. The girl was conscious, but she had abandoned all effort to escape from the ropes that lashed her to the frame. She was sobbing quietly to herself. Then as Crowe came up to her and applied the sponge soaked with the antiseptic solution to her back, her body stiffened convulsively. "Please," she choked out. "*Please, God, let me die!*"

Hedson clenched his teeth. To think of that loveliness destroyed, that body deformed, the blue eyes replaced with the dead, green eyes of a cat—

"No!" he shouted. "Crowe, stop it. Give you anything. Anything you want."

Crowe turned his head slightly toward the doctor. "I am not aware that you have anything that I want, Doctor," and calmly proceeded with the sterilization of the girl's flesh.

Hedson's frantic gaze darted to the shelf above the work bench. If he swung the hydraulic lift around, counter-clock wise, he might be able to touch that shelf. He *had* to touch that shelf; had to reach the glycerin. It was the only chance of escape, and it was slimmer than a thread from a spider's web.

He reached out his left hand and touched the shaft hanging. With all the strength that was in his arm, he shoved against the hanging. The hydraulic lift swung around silently and ponderously. Hedson's heart gave a bound. He could now touch the shelf, but his fingers were inches from the can of glycerin. He shot a glance at Crowe. The vengeance-mad genius was removing a number of large hypodermic needles from a sterilizer. It was only a matter of minutes before his hellish process would be under way.

Hedson strained against the ropes that held his shoulders to the rack. They gave an inch, two inches. He touched the glycerin can, pulled it toward him, tipped it over on its side. The clear, sluggish liquid

gurgled from the opening, dropped in a steady stream upon the mound of powdered potassium permanganate crystals. Hedson pushed the can back on the shelf. Then he pushed the hydraulic lift back a little way until the knotted rope that crossed over his shoulders was directly above the chemicals on the bench. And he waited—agonizing seconds, he waited. What if the can had not contained glycerin? What if the glycerin was not of sufficient purity to foster the violent chemical reaction he expected?

But even as these maddening thoughts churned in his brain, there was a blinding flash of purple-hued light. Flame like that from a blow torch leaped into the air. Heat from it singed Hedson's hair, but a steel cross member of the rack kept his clothes from catching fire. But the rope? Did he smell rope burning? Or was it merely that wad of waste on the bench?

Crowe stepped back from the rack to which the girl was bound. He turned around, was stunned for a moment by the purple flash of flame. Then he leaped to the wall, seized a valve and spun it around. Hedson felt motion beneath him, saw a triumphant leer in Crowe's eyes. The hydraulic lift was moving upwards, beyond the reach of the flame. It was moving toward the black beams of the ceiling, moving to crush the life out of the helpless man tied to it.

THEN Crowe ran the length of the room to a hose reel. He seized one end of the hose and ran with it toward the bottom of the stairs. The fire was spreading across the bench, reaching for the cans of oil that were standing on the shelves above. Hedson writhed and twisted. Something was searing his neck. The rope! It *had* caught fire.

With a mighty heave that strained every muscle of belly and shoulders, Hedson tore away from the grease rack. But at the same time, his head struck the beams

of the ceiling above. The lift was still moving upwards. He forced himself to lie flat against the frame. Still, the black beams came nearer. He *had* to move or be crushed to death, yet the rope still crossed and recrossed his ankles.

Desperately, he rolled sideways, rolled from the rack to hang head down. But as his body swung down like a pendulum, the ropes about his ankles slipped from the other end of the grease rack. He fell head first to the floor, landed on his shoulders, and somersaulted to his feet.

He raced across to the rack where Flo was bound. "Darling!" he breathed, and nothing more, for time was too precious to waste on words.

Crowe came back with the hose spurt-ing. He saw Hedson tearing at the knots that held the girl. With an oath, he sprang at the doctor. But Hedson was ready for him. The doctor leaped to the bench, seized one of the largest grease cans, flung it straight at Crowe's head. Crowe toppled over backwards to the floor, tried to get up, couldn't make it.

Hedson was already back at the rack, tearing away the ropes that bound the girl. The fire was well rooted in a tank of oil near the panther's cage. The black brute, terrified by the smell of smoke, redoubled its efforts to escape. The flimsy door of the cage was buckling under its blind, frantic efforts.

The last rope tore away. Hedson had the girl in his arms. Hastily, he gathered her rag of a dress about her and started for the steps. Crowe was on his feet again, weaving across the floor in an effort to cut off their escape. There was a gun in his hand. He stopped, legs wide-spread, to steady himself. He raised his gun, stared down along the barrel.

Out of the smoke and flame, a snarling, vengeful shadow came hurtling through the air. Just as the gun in Crowe's hand

spat its lethal charge, the blind, black panther landed on Crowe's shoulders.

Cries of the furious beast and the frightened man mingled with the ever increasing roar of the flames as Hedson and Flo gained the upper floor of the garage

"There was a spark of madness burning always in Henry Crowe's brain," Hedson afterwards explained to Flo. "He was thrown out of college because of his revolting experiments. His insane vengeance must have extended to the entire medical profession, but he was particularly anxious to get even with the committee of professors that threw him out of medical college.

"So he kidnaped those fine old doctors, as he kidnaped you, made freaks out of them by his accursed surgery, sold them to Whit Jennings, that they might be exhibited to the public. The poor doctors couldn't tell what had happened to them because Crowe always performed some sort of operation on mouth or throat that prevented them from talking."

"When did you first suspect him?" Flo asked.

"Tonight. When we encountered that unfortunate monster that had escaped from Jennings' show, I noted that the creature tried to escape as soon as it saw Crowe. And that awakened suspicions I had had that Crowe was mad.

"The poor devil had telephoned to me for aid, yet when Crowe appeared, the monster ran away. Evidently, it feared further torment. So it slipped off into the black water, slipped off into death. Later when I got back to my office, I telephoned Crowe's old school and learned the details of his dismissal. But let's try and forget such things, Flo. We've got to forget."

She nodded her lovely head. "Because we're going to be happy, dear, utterly happy."