

STARTLING 15¢ MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

VOL. 1

APRIL, 1940

NO. 2

TWO FULL LENGTH NOVELS OF EERIE MENACE

FLESH FOR THE DEVIL'S PIPER.....Wayne Rogers 6

The girls who heard the love-call sent from the depths of Dead Man's pond were filled with a raging madness that made them plunge eagerly into the dark waters for a rendezvous with death!

BUS LINE FOR THE DEAD.....Otis Cameron 62

The horror of that journey with the cadavers had only just begun for Nell Mansfield when the death bus stopped. For it brought her to a picnic where rotting corpses from the grave danced around the fires that would roast her flesh!

TWO BLOOD-CHILLING NOVELETTES

DEATH STOCKS HIS HAREM.....Francis James 38

Hell had spawned upon the city street a brood of hideously deformed monsters who made the night clamor with the groans of murdered men and the agonized screams of lovely women!

THE POOL OF AGONY.....Conrad Kimball 66

How could I watch that inhuman diving contest and not go mad? The pool into which those monsters were about to throw my beloved fiancée was filled with boiling oil!

THREE SHORT STORIES OF STARK TERROR

MY HANDS WANT BLOOD.....Richard Huzarski 28

The madness in Red Cramer's blood changed his love into a saturnalia of murder where his gentle caresses mingled with the tortures of a fiend!

THE DINNER COOKED IN HELL.....Mindret Lord 56

The meal was baked in the ovens of hell; the entertainment was planned in the antechamber of Satan!

I AM THE DEMON.....William B. Rainey 79

My mind was twisted by lust for speed, but I knew that a living death awaited me if I didn't drive in tomorrow's race; knew that if I did, my wife and child would perish!

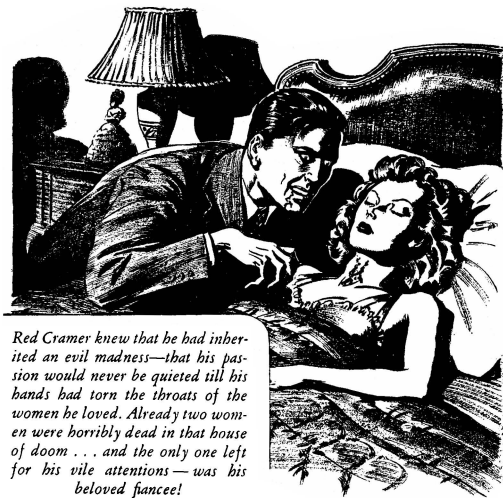
— AND —

DEATH'S HAND-MAIDEN.....The Editors 4

THE CRYPT.....A Department 89

MY HANDS WANT BLOOD

by Richard G. Huzarski



Red Cramer knew that he had inherited an evil madness—that his passion would never be quieted till his hands had torn the throats of the women he loved. Already two women were horribly dead in that house of doom . . . and the only one left for his vile attentions—was his beloved fiancée!

THE northwester spun snow across the road. I shivered and turned up the car window. A futile, forlorn gesture, designed only to persuade myself that the creeping cold inside me was caused by the wind. But the chill that reached deeper than the marrow of my bones kept on increasing, as the red bus climbed closer and closer toward the crossroads where I was parked. Diane Forest, the chum of my childhood, the sweetheart of my adolescence, was in that bus. How could I help but shudder?

The big wheels skidded a bit, then the bus stopped by the *Bloodstone—6 Mi.* sign. I was out of my car, waiting tensely. The narrow door swung outward in a slow arc, as if reluctant to open. Then the driver's pale face peered out. He took a quick, cautious look around—noticed me. His eyes stayed on me as he jumped off hurriedly, too hurriedly, and dropped a couple of bags on the snow.

Now Diane was coming down. Without offering her his arm, without taking his gaze off me, the driver sprang back, and

slammed the door. Even as I ran toward her, the bus started away with a groan of rapidly shifted gears.

God, but she was beautiful with her rose-petal cheeks over the silver fox collar, with her aquamarine eyes smiling at me! Then she was in my arms, soft, warm, glorious. I pressed her to me. Oh, no—not half as hard as every atom of my body wanted to press her. The bus was still too near. Behind its partly frozen windows I could still see many eyes, eager, round with morbid curiosity.

Finally they vanished behind the snow banks past the turn. Only then our lips met. With all the hunger that had been pent up in me by three years of our forced separation I savored ecstasy of her nearness.

"You've waited, Red," she panted over the kiss. "I knew you'd . . ."

That was all I heard. A wild, crimson haze was swirling in my mind. Against my will my arms went tighter and tighter around her. Through all the thickness of the clothing I felt her breast flatten against my chest. Like a captured bird she fluttered, her heart pounding a frantic, frightened cadence against me . . . louder . . . louder . . .

She screamed. A weak, piteous sound of protest that somehow managed to bring me back to my senses. I jerked away. Her hands came up to her lips where my teeth had cut in and brought forth two large drops of blood.

"Red," she whispered, smiling weakly. "Still the same wild, passionate Red."

The crimson fog was dispersing, and now my fears came back. Was she right? Was that just passion? With my whole soul I hoped that that was so. But then I remembered all the people I had met in the past three years—frightened, cringing from me. Like the ones on the local run of this bus, they knew about my ghastly heritage, while she did not.

"Come, Dee," I said, and pointed to

the car. "I'll take you home." She sprang in eagerly. We started—on the way to happiness or doom. I did not know which it would be.

WE DROVE between the snow banks through the broad Bloodstone Valley, leaving the village to one side. Dee studied the country. "Not much has changed here, has it, Red?"

"Oh, there are changes." I was glad that her question gave me a chance to escape from my thoughts. "Our mines are completely abandoned. The men moved to Nugget when the veins ran out. No more pyrite ore, no more gold and silver. Only one man has stayed behind. Casper Brennan. Remember him? He used to tell us stories of the gnomes in the mines when we were kids. He's salvaging the old mine dumps near the road. Look, you can see him already."

The old man was digging a hole under the snow, probably to sink in a powder charge and loosen the frozen gravel that he worked in his small flotation mill. I blew the horn to attract his attention. But either his senile senses failed to register it, or he deliberately ignored us, for though we passed within fifty feet from him he kept right on digging.

"Poor fellow," Dee said. "He never was strong of hearing." We smiled at each other reassuringly, looked in the other direction. And then my smile died.

There, rising high above the valley, stood a hill. Softly rounded and wrinkled with erosion, it looked like a huge, fat man's belly, with a black wooden cross where the navel would be.

To Dee it meant nothing—yet. But I knew I had to warn her now, before it was too late, before fate might close its horrible noose about her.

"THERE'S something I must tell you, Dee," I started lamely. "Something that cross there means to you and me."

My head indicated the direction. "You don't know about it. Uncle Basil didn't tell me until he'd shipped you to the lycée in France."

She looked toward the hill's top, more curious than frightened. But then she saw my face. "What . . . what is it, Red?"

"It happened when I was three years old," I said, and tried to keep my voice level. "One night my mother was found murdered, terribly mutilated, in her bed. You know that much."

"Yes, Red."

"There's a sequel to the story," I continued. "People went looking for my father. They found him in a Bloodstone tavern, laughing crazily in a drunken stupor. It didn't surprise them. You heard about him, Dee, about his wild, mysterious youth, about his stumbling over a vein here, and becoming rich. A man like that might be expected to drink."

"He grieved deeply for mother, though. At least, that's how the men explained his wild drinking after her death, his haggard appearance, and the fierce fights he'd start with innocent bystanders. His nerves were strained—they said."

"But at the same time some village girls began to vanish. Then one was found. Later another and another. Each one dead, ravished, mutilated. A vigilante committee was formed. When someone heard a scream on this hill one night, they dashed for it."

"Yes, they found him there, Dee. Kneeling over his last dead victim, smeared with her blood, so insane that he laughed at them as they swung their picks and crowbars to kill him."

Dee's eyes studied my face; then she patted my hand conciliatingly. "It's a terrible story, Red."

"A story! But don't you see, darling, don't you understand now those whispered remarks we half heard in our childhood? Why the Cornish women told their sons not to play with me? Listen, Dee; as I

grew older even the Chinese placer miners began to shun me. Uncle Basil sent you to lycée in France because he'd seen me kiss you. If it weren't for the war, he'd still keep you there. He loves us both, wants us to be happy—but with a sex fiend's blood in me . . . If some day I should . . ."

Surprisingly she smiled at me. "That day shall never come, Red. The story may be true, that may be your heredity. But such things can be fought. You'll fight it with your own will, and I'll help you, Red, because I love you. Even if we should begin to fail, there are doctors, psychiatrists."

She patted my hand on the steering wheel again, warmly, caressingly—the hand that I would soon see dripping with the life blood of innocent women—dripping with her blood.

SEVERAL people waited for us in our lonely, granite house at the head of the valley, when we drove in. Uncle Basil took Dee in his long, gaunt arms, kissed her frost-rouged cheeks. He had inherited her from a friend killed in the World War, brought her up just like he did the rest of us. There was a warm smile on his lean features, a smile that almost concealed the lines of deep worry.

Bill Trembarth, the butler, and his wife who kept our house, greeted her. Then their plump daughter Judy squeezed Dee to her soft bosom. Dee's junior by four years, she was like a kid sister to her. Only George, my half-brother from my mother's first marriage, seemed somewhat cool. Jealous, I thought; jealous of our love as ever.

The dinner started as a success. Dee talked of her life in France, while George watched her avidly. Uncle Basil's faded gray eyes kept shifting from her to me as if trying to probe our minds, peer through the black veil of the future.

And I . . . I was thinking of the ter-

rible chance the two of us were taking, of the horrid, bloody nightmares that had infested my dreams in the past months, getting more vivid, more awe-inspiring each time, till they began to carry over into my waking hours. Forcibly I shook the thoughts off. That way lay madness.

Somewhere in the distance a feeble explosion jarred the still evening. Casper Brennan was blasting in the dump. Then Dee went to the parlor to play Chopin for us, at Uncle's request. George sat on the piano bench, very near to her, under the pretext of turning the music pages. I watched her slender waist, the down on her neck, and thought how warm, how yielding her flesh would be if I should suddenly. . . .

There was a moist, sticky feeling on my chin. Saliva! It had drooled from the corner of my mouth. Quickly I wiped it off—but not before Uncle Basil's eyes had seen. His eyes were hard when he said, "You must be tired, Diane. How about some sleep?"

He escorted her to her bedroom while I went to mine. Out in the long corridor he stopped after she had gone in, watched me. I slammed my door. Good God—if the man were right, his fears well grounded, then what right did I have to be so near her? Would not it be better if I should. . . .

A light in the window of the wing across the garden caught my stare. I stood rigidly, mouth wide, breath hissing. Judy Trembarth was undressing there. And she had forgotten to draw her shade.

Through the red fog of my mounting passion I saw her pull the hem of her dress over her curly head. My eyes narrowed to mere slits when her pink slip followed the dress. Now there was nothing between her youthful, robust body and my feverish gaze but the flimsy transparency of the dainty silks. My nails were deep into my palms, chest working.

I tried to turn my head away, to shut my eyes, but force greater than my own kept them on the vision of her voluptuous form.

Step by step, each one faster, each harder to resist, I felt myself drawn toward the window, felt my hands reaching for the latch.

Then, with the last effort of my dying will I reached up and jerked my shade down. Panting, I threw myself onto the bed. Judy! Oh, God, how could I! A mere child of sixteen. I rubbed at my eyes to erase the vision of her loveliness that burned into my tortured mind. But it persisted.

Desperately I grasped the box of aspirins on my bed table, as I had grasped it each time my nightmares had wakened me. I swallowed five pills. Maybe that would help.

BUT it did not. It only dazed my brain till I was not sure whether I was in dreams or in reality. And still she was there before me, bending over to pull off her silken stockings, reaching for the elastic band at her waist. . . .

That was too much for me. If I were insane, then let me be, let them catch me, let them kill me! I did not care. Anything would be better than this torture.

I slipped off the bed, tiptoed to the door. There was no one in the corridor. Noiselessly I went toward the Trembarth's wing. Judy's door was at the end of the hall, near a stairway. I crept toward it.

Somebody gasped down where the stairs ran into the basement. It was Mrs. Trembarth, the housekeeper. She saw me and ran up. There was a tray full of sirup bottles and preserve jars in her big hands. One bottle was broken.

Fear flashed in her eyes. "What're you doing here, Red Cramer?" she whispered, and backed slowly, barring my way to her daughter's room. "You aren't going there. I won't let you!"

She was by the door now, shielding it. Behind that door was Judy, young, warm, tempting. The red haze did not leave my mind, but there was something else there, too. Cold, ruthless cunning. "Of course not, Mrs. Trembarth," I said, and it was terribly hard to keep my voice from breaking. "I was just going by. Now if you don't mind . . ." I started past her.

But as I was even with her, I caught a long sliver of the broken bottle with one quick movement and drove it into her soft throat.

She slumped down slowly, still holding onto her tray, tried to scream, but her throat only gargled thick, ruddy foam. I stared mutely at her body, and as it shuddered in the last spasms, my sanity came back. A ghastly realization came with it.

I had done it, killed her! Oh, God! Now they would send me to an asylum. And Dee? And our future happiness?

The sliver of glass had broken off in my hand and cut my palm, but I did not feel the pain. Slowly I backed toward my room. I must think. I must do something. But what was there to do?

In resignation I threw myself on my bed. Insane! Well, if that was what I was, then Dee would be safer, happier, if I were in a padded cell. I lay waiting for someone to discover the dead body in the hall, for the sound of fateful steps.

SOMEBODY was knocking at my door, insistently. I opened my eyes, jerked to a sitting position, and shook my head dazedly. The sun was shining into my room, sparkling on the snow outside the ledge.

Lord, what a nightmare! I went to the door and opened it. Dee stood outside, her oval face pale above the white housecoat.

"Red," she whispered. "Come quickly. Something terrible has happened!"

I knew then, but I wouldn't admit the

thought, as I followed her down the corridor.

There, in front of Judy Trembarth's door, lay her mother's body. The woman's glazed eyes were staring vacantly up to the three men who leaned over her. Judy knelt by the body, her bosom rocking violently with loud sobs.

Uncle Basil's faded eyes were on me, reproachful, accusing. Bill Trembarth glared with open hatred, clenching and opening his fists, as if trying to hold back from springing at me.

Only my half-brother George was calm. I even thought I saw a vague smile on his handsome, strong face. Yes, he would have reason to smile. With me out of the way, given time, he could win Dee for himself. And he would have the time. . . .

I could not bear their eyes on me, could not stand their gaping. Something had to be done. A vague, wild hope gleamed up in me. Perhaps Mrs. Trembarth was not quite dead yet! I knelt by her. One touch was enough. Her flesh felt like something from a cold storage room. Its clamminess made me jerk away.

Dee was swaying, gasping heavily, unable to stand the sight of blood. To steady her, I grasped her arm. She got control of herself, even tried to smile at me.

Poor, brave girl!—she still believed in me. Oh, how I wished there were reason for her belief. Maybe there was. I tried to clutch at the idea. Maybe it had been only a nightmare, and someone else had done this. . . .

But then I let go of Dee's arm. Where my fingers had touched her were five red streaks of half-dried blood. Had it been on my hand all the time? I looked at my palm. Perhaps I'd smeared it while touching the woman a moment ago.

But no! Running diagonally from the base of my thumb, a deep, swollen gash transversed my hand where a sliver of glass had broken off in it.

Dee said weakly, "She must have been



carrying the tray when she slipped, and that jagged piece killed her."

How could anybody believe that a heavy woman could crash upon a trayful of glass in the stillness of the night without waking someone?

I had made my decision quickly. I would go away now, give myself up. That was the only way I could make Dee happy. It would save her for George. There was no taint of homicidal mania in his blood.

I faced the men. "I'm driving to Nugget to get the sheriff and a doctor," I said. "I'll be dressed in a minute."

Yes, that was best. I would never come back. Dee would not even know where I had gone.

Uncle Basil and George accepted my offer silently. But Bill Trembarth, his hating eyes still on me, his soul torn between grief and hatred, moved closer. "I'm going with you, Mr. Red," he muttered, probably afraid I would run away, try to elude punishment for killing his wife.

There was something unwieldy under his long coat when I met him in the garage a few minutes later. A shotgun. He was taking no chances. I jumped in and started the car.

WE WERE already on the driveway when suddenly something like a powerful air wave slammed the car, made me swerve the steering wheel before the

radiator buried itself in a snow bank. Then the roar of an explosion jarred our eardrums.

"What was that?" Trembarth gasped.

I did not know until I had driven over a mile. Then, as we approached the dumps where old Casper Brennan had worked his flotation mill, we found out.

For now, where his workings had been, only a huge, black hole gaped in the surrounding whiteness. The old man must have walked absent-mindedly into his powder house beneath the dump with his pipe glowing. The high mound, cracked and rent, gave evidence of the violence of the explosion. Half of it, hundreds of tons of gravel, had slipped across the road, barring our progress. Casper was nowhere in sight, though we called and searched.

I thought of driving around the debris, but off the road the snow was over the tops of the sage bush, and the slope was high and steep.

No, there was no getting out till the snow-plow man made his run this way, discovered the damage, and sent a crew with steam shovels. Until then I would have to wait. Wait under the same roof with Dee, wait until the red fog claimed my soul again, sent me to her—no, I would not let that happen. I would drive Bill home, and then start walking to Nugget. I had to get away.

But back in the garage, Bill stood by



the car door, watching me. And when I did not stir, he said in a tense voice, "Come, Mr. Red." and the shotgun rose up a bit.

I had no alternative. With my head low, I started toward the house, toward Dee, Bill Trembarth following two paces behind me.

I told them inside what had happened. Dee listened intently, while Judy Trembarth's sobs kept tearing at the silence. The men watched me. Then we carried Mrs. Trembarth's body to the garden shed. There was nothing else we could do.

Later, I noticed a bulge in Bill's pocket. He stayed in his rooms most of the time. And when he was not there, I could feel his gaze on me, peering through cracks in the door, from behind the curtains. I meant to talk to him, but you cannot just go to a man and say, "Look, Bill, I know I'm crazy. I'm going to give myself up." He would not believe it; would think it a ruse.

AND so the day passed. Dee cooked the meals, while my uncle watched silently. Only George seemed able to maintain his poise. He even asked Dee to play the piano—looking for a pretense to sit by her, no doubt. But she refused. Music in this house would be a sacrilege.

Before I went to bed I stopped Dee in the corridor. She tried to smile at me. "Dee, darling," I put my arms around her, felt her warm body against mine. Her reserve broke down suddenly after a day of tortured, strained struggle. A deep sob rose from somewhere far within her. She held her face against my chest. "You didn't! You couldn't have done it, Red! She must have fallen!"

I patted her golden curls. "Yes, Dee. Of course. Don't cry now, darling. Everything will be all right."

But then a cold fear clutched at me.

"Dee, do me a favor," I whispered. "Before you go to bed, will you please

lock your door. No, don't be frightened. It's just to make sure. We must make absolutely sure."

Her shoulders shook violently, sending her young breast a quiver. I felt her warmth, and—oh, God, in that moment of stress, of tragedy, devastating passion began to crawl through me, rushing the blood to my brain, drowning my reason.

Quickly I pushed her away from me, ran into my room. I tried not to look into Judy's window, but the mere thought, the mere memory of last night's sight sent throbs of live fire through my veins.

I took a cold drink, threw myself on the bed. I could not say how long I lay there, fighting, trying to subdue the demon that was taking slow possession of me. But it was a losing battle.

As if pulled by each nerve in my body. I got up, moved quietly along the corridor's wall. My mind seemed to go blank for a while, for the next thing I knew I was in Judy's room.

She lay under a quilt that outlined her voluptuous softness. I must have made a noise, for suddenly she sat up, looked at me. Her lips parted to emit a scream. I could sense it start deep in her lungs, fill her throat. But it never burst through, for my lips were upon hers, my arms crushing her to me.

What followed was a wild, frenzied saturnalia of unleashed passion, where caresses of a lover mingled with the cruelty of a fiend, sighs and endearments with gasps of pain, ecstasy with agony, and love with death.

I CAME to on my own bed, drenched with sweat. A dream, I thought. A dream, this time. But there was warm, fresh blood on the cover of my pillow. Was it mine? Had the gash on my palm opened in my thrashing around?

Yes, it was open. But there was too much blood on me, on my face, on my body!

Frantically I sprang out. I had to make sure. Without hesitating I went along the corridor. Bill Trembarth was dozing on a chair that leaned against his daughter's door. His right hand was in his pocket.

But there was another way. The garden window. In spite of the cold outside I hurried through the rear door. Even before I had gotten there I knew my fears were true. The lower pane had been smashed inward.

And Judy—I could not see her in the gloom. But I had to find out. I had to know! Heedless of the sharp edges of glass cutting my skin, I stuck my head, my chest, into the room. And still the footboard hid her from me. I pulled myself all the way in.

Then I saw her. Like a blood-soaked rag she hung limply over the edge of the bed, while many slow, dark rivulets drooled from her gouged wounds. One cheek was torn from her eye downward, so deeply that the eyeball rolled out, and, hanging only by nerves and muscles, stared at me in the moonlight.

As if frozen, I stood there numb, while time died; the world hung suspended. Only one woman was left in the house now. Would I . . . No, not Dee! I would run away!

And then, outside the door, a voice said, so suddenly that it made spin, "Judy! Is that you, Judy! Judy, wake up! Answer me!" It was Bill Trembarth.

Now I could see him, gun in hand, darting over the threshold. His eyes found me. Like a thing possessed, he charged. The gun came up.

I understood now how my father could have laughed in the face of death. It must have been a relief to him, just as it would soon be to me.

The muzzle was only inches from my face, its black bore staring me in the eyes. Bill's finger was tightening, tightening. The hammer of the ancient Civil War Colt scraped a little as it rose, and fell

with a dull click. The loose drum had evidently not turned the whole arc. Bill swore wildly, swung the weapon at me. The instinct of self-preservation made me raise my arm to ward off the blow. The next instant he was on me, crushing me to the floor. I did not fight back, only covered my face so I would not see the blows of his fists, his feet.

I heard others rushing into the room. Together they tied me with ropes and towels. Blood from the wounds on my head blinded me so that I could not see Dee. But I hear her sobbing weakly, forlornly, somewhere near the door as the men carried me between them.

They were taking me to the basement. I felt them descend the stairway, felt the dankness of the floor when they dropped me down. Bill Trembarth was still howling and sobbing and swearing.

Uncle Basil said, "I'm afraid, George, we'll have to keep him here till the sheriff comes. We've waited too long already."

"Sheriff!" Bill Trembarth howled. "There'll be no sheriff for him. There ain't no justice for his kind. I'm going to Nugget. I'll tell the miners. They'll make short work of him, just like they did with his father. A rope's all he deserves."

His feet were pounding away. Then George and my uncle started after him.

I did not care if they caught him. I was hoping they would not. A noose would be more merciful than a lifetime of nightmares in a padded cell.

SOMEWHERE up in the house a woman groaned. Dee, I thought, my poor Dee, sobbing out the agony of her soul.

But no. There was a note of protest, of indignation in her voice. And it was drawing nearer. Then her words were drowned in an angry bellow, in curses and grunts of embattled men. Something thundered at the head of the stairway, as

an overturned table might. They must have caught Bill Trembarth, were trying to hold him.

The scraping of feet, the noise of heavy blows came to me. There was a thud, and a body started rolling slowly, then faster and faster down the stairway toward where I lay. Its flaccid mass thumped into me, stretched limply across my knees.

Who was it? There was a bag of potatoes touching my head. I twisted my neck, rubbed my eyes against the burlap to wipe the blood off.

A few rays of moonlight reflected from the snow managed to find their way into the cellar through a high window. But it was too dark to recognize the body. And then my attention was torn away from it. A woman screamed upstairs, a high, shrill scream of deathly fear. Steps were pounding overhead, speeding down the stairway.

Dee sprang into the basement. I saw the moon rays glisten on the light silk of her housecoat as she tore toward me.

But she never reached me. From the dark rectangle of the door a hand streaked after her. She screamed again. Then the light switch clicked on, and I saw her struggling furiously in the long arms of Uncle Basil.

"Let go!" she pleaded. "Let go of me!"

"Let go of you? Now?" A horrible smile twisted the face that was florid with passion. "No! Not after I've waited for this chance ever since you developed into your full beauty." He pushed her struggling body toward an old couch.

"Red! Red!" she pleaded.

I tried to tear my tied wrists apart. But the bonds were strong. The weight of the man across my legs held me down. I looked at him. It was my half-brother George. His face was deathly white, all except the blotch of blood on his forehead. And his head lolled as I jerked and twisted.

Dee was on the couch now, writhing and tossing. The rusty springs protruding through the ancient upholstery tore her housecoat, her skin. My uncle was forcing her back, leering down at her. "You may just as well stop struggling," he hissed. "You haven't much longer anyhow, my dear. You see—much as I hate to, I'll have to kill you immediately after."

"You can't . . . you can't do it."

"Oh, can't I? I managed to with Mrs. Trembarth and Judy all right. Why should I fail now. Everybody will suspect Red, after Trembarth reaches Nugget. I've planned all this quite carefully. Now I'm ready. All I have to do after you're gone is to untie Red's bonds, shoot him, and tell the men Trembarth brings back that Red had broken loose and killed you and George, and that I had to kill him. They'll believe it. Even he himself believed that he killed the two women." The man looked at me and laughed a short, crazy laugh. "Didn't you, Red?"

"Yes," I panted. "Yes. I believed it." I thought I could feel George stirring weakly. Then in the shade of the potato sack his hand started creeping toward my bonds. But I needed time, desperately. "How did you do it?" I asked. "How could you have made me feel that way?"

"Same way I'd done it to your father." Uncle Basil was beaming with unholy pride. "When I wanted to get control of the mines and your endowments. It's simple if you know enough biology and medicine. I fed him aphrodisiacs and harmonic extracts in every bit of his food I could get hold of. With the drugs in him, he began to feel like a lustful beast each time he looked at a woman. Sex became paramount in his mind. He lived it, dreamed it, the same as you did."

GEORGE'S fingers had found the knots, were fumbling with them slowly, dreadfully slowly. Dee had ceased

struggling, lay limp in a dead faint—at the complete mercy of the fiend.

"As to the rest of it," he said, sneering, "as to your wild visions—well, that was no trouble. I'd substituted powerful sedatives for your aspirins, dissolved them in your drinking water. Then I watched you, Red. And when you slipped into the stupor that lies on the borderline between sleep and waking, when your mind was wide open to any suggestion, I went and killed first Mrs. Trembarth and then Judy. And each time I came to you and told you of how you'd killed them. It may be impossible to hypnotize a man to do what is atrocious to him, but it is easy to make him believe that he's dreaming something. And then when you woke up and found the blood I'd smeared on you, and the corpses I'd left just like I made you dream you left them, you weren't sure. The evidence began to pile up, your mind started cracking."

He looked down on Dee, and suddenly lost interest in me. I saw his hand reach for the décolleté of her housecoat.

Time! I had to have more time! Just a minute more. Already the knots were getting loose.

"Listen!" I screamed. "Why—why did you do it?"

"The mines, you fool!"

"But the mines are dead, spent."

"Oh, no, they aren't. Old Casper Brennan found a new vein while digging

about the dumps. I told him to keep mum. Then I blew him up with a delayed fuse in his powder house. I didn't want to share the wealth with him any more than I wanted to share it with you."

His hand jerked, came up with a fragment of silk. With bloodshot eyes he glared on Dee's nudity for an instant . . .

I was free! With one leap I was on my feet. He spun around. A gun appeared in his hand. There were yards between us. I knew he would shoot me before I could reach him. But I took a step forward. The shot roared like a salvo, yet there was no pain, no impact. Then I saw him slipping down.

From the door Bill Trembarth's shaking, broken voice said, "I couldn't reach Nugget. The snow stopped me. So I came back to kill you myself, Mr. Red. But then I saw him, heard him . . ."

I lifted Dee from the couch. She was still limp. The blood from her scratches trickled warmly between my fingers when I carried her upstairs. I was hoping that was the last time I would feel a woman's blood—But would it be?

We were married months ago, but even now when I press her to my chest, when I feel her breast flatten against me, something like a red haze dims my mind, and I press harder, harder . . . Will those drugs I had been fed ever wear off, or will I some day . . . like a mad fiend. . . .

I can only pray and hope.