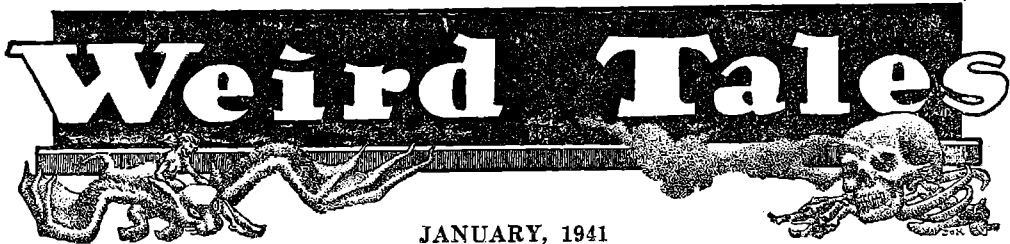


# Weird Tales



JANUARY, 1941

NOVELETTES

<b>DRAGON MOON</b> . . . . .	Henry Kuttner	6
<i>Compelling Tale of the Days When the World Was Young— and the Sorcery and Dark Evil That Hung Above Atlantis</i>		
<b>TWO SHALL BE BORN</b> . . . . .	Seabury Quinn	104
<i>She Had Awakened from the Long Sleep That Knows No Waking, and Risen from the Narrow Bed from Which There Is No Arising</i>		

SHORT STORIES

<b>THE GODDESS OF ZION</b> . . . . .	David H. Keller, M. D.	31
<i>That Mountain Had a Way of Asking Questions Few Could Answer</i>		
<b>HOUSE OF THE HATCHET</b> . . . . .	Robert Bloch	40
<i>"I Am Death to You. I Shall Numb Your Body and Your Brain—I Shall Be Your Lord and Master"</i>		
<b>MIRAGE</b> . . . . .	O. M. Cabral	51
<i>Miles of Scorching Sand . . . and Cattle Munched Sleepily. There Were Houses and Gardens in the Valley of Death</i>		
<b>TEST TUBE TWIN</b> . . . . .	Ralph Milne Farley	64
<i>Six Months After Birth "It" Was His Exact Replica at Thirty</i>		
<b>HONEYMOON IN BEDLAM</b> . . . . .	Nelson S. Bond	74
<i>Humor and Thrills When Newlyweds of the Future Get a Taste of Interplanetary Honeymooning</i>		
<b>LUPA</b> . . . . .	Robert Barbour Johnson	86
<i>Have They a Meaning—Those Queer, Monstrous Hintings That Have Come Down to Us Since Man's Beginning?</i>		
<b>PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN</b> . . . . .	Loretta Burroughs	93
<i>"When Carver Grave and Crawford House Stand Face to Face, There Will Be Trouble in This Place"</i>		
<b>RING ECLIPSE (Poem)</b> . . . . .	Mary Elizabeth Counselman	85
<b>SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS</b> . . . . .	Irwin J. Weill	62
<b>THE EYRIE</b> . . . . .		121
<b>WEIRD TALES CLUB</b> . . . . .		125

Cover by Harold S. De Lay

*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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H. AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.



"The dog that howls is supposed to be John Carver's dog, and therefore—  
not alive."

# Person or Persons Unknown

By LORETTA BURROUGH

*The murderer and his dog could not rest in the crossroads grave where they had been buried.*

THE car pulled up out of the mist and I saw Paul's house before me on the hill, a single light shining in it, the long old line of its roof folding like a wing above it. It was a large house built large for those great families that men used to have, and I thought that Paul must feel like a small pea rattling about in it. In his letter, he had said he was

lonely; he had written that he missed Mary and the children so much that he felt like a ghost in a place it doesn't want to haunt. Paul was usually a cheerful man; that letter, with its curious undertone of unhappiness, had startled me into taking his invitation, if for nothing more than to satisfy myself he was really all right.

Almost before I had brought the car to

a stop on the driveway, the house door opened and Paul ran down the steps, as though he had been watching for me. He opened the car door and thrust his hand in.

"Oh, Rob, this is fine!" he cried, shaking my hand. "I certainly am glad to see you! Come in and get warm and have a drink." He said it just like that, in spurts of words, while he nearly wrung my fingers off.

I told him how glad I was to see him, got out, and helped carry my bags into the house, but I was startled, taken aback. He had made me think of a drowning man who sees a boat put out toward him from a rescue ship. The sight of me had made him too happy.

"How have you been?" I said, looking closely at him in the lighted hall.

"Don't give me that clinical eye," he said with a little laugh. "You doctors—"

He stood there smiling nervously as though he objected to being looked over, and I saw that he had lost a great deal of weight, for one thing. Under his eyes were the dark muddy shadows that came from chronic fatigue, and his hands, lighting a cigarette, were shaky.

"You make me feel like a bug under a microscope," he complained. "No, I haven't been sleeping well, and what of it? Come on in and have that drink!"

"Sure," I said. I followed him into the large low beamed living-room. A great fire poured blistering heat from the enormous hearth. At one end of the long room was a big curved window of many paned glass, and I could see the light of the risen moon beginning to shine on what was left of the garden.

"You must be proud of your house," I said, taking my filled glass from him. "What you've done to it, I mean." Paul's family had built the house before the Revolution. But in the middle eighteen hundreds they had migrated to New York, and the house, in other hands, had slipped

steadily downhill until it was little better than a wreck when Paul bought it back. "It must be nice to think, that after so many years, Crawfords are living in it again."

"Ye-es," he said, as though he weren't sure. "I'll be glad when Mary and the children get home. It's too big for one man—I just rattle around in it. Our maid left us to get married, just before Mary went away, so I'm all alone here—" He frowned down into the leaping fire, forgetting the drink he held in his hand. "But I manage all right. A cleaning woman comes out from the village every morning—after the sun is well up."

There was something so queer in his voice when he said that, and in the look with which he stared into the fire, that I was startled. "You wouldn't want her before dawn, would you?"

"The days are getting so short," he said, which was hardly any answer. "And the whole village is afraid of the dark." Then he looked at me, as though he had been talking to himself, and had just realized it. "Well, cheer up. I'm a very good cook, you know, and we shan't have to wash any slops."

"His face brightened slowly. "What nonsense one gets to think, living alone! It's good for me you're here. And next week, before you go, Mary and the children will be back." He lifted the glass he had forgotten and took a long drink. "Her mother's much better, thank God! I'd almost begun to hate the old lady for keeping Mary so long."

While we talked, my thoughts circled uneasily about the queer things he had said a moment ago. What was behind his remark that the whole village was afraid of the dark? Why was Paul reduced to this bundle of nerves and fatigue? I watched him, making up my mind that even if he did not mean to tell me, I would find out—a doctor generally can.

THE dinner was excellent, and we ended it up with coffee and cigars and that long lazy talk of friends who have not met for a long time. I don't know how we got on the subject of the drought that had been sitting like a dry spider on the eastern states for months, but we did.

"It made a mess of our garden," Paul said. "But it did other more interesting things around here. Maybe you read about it in the papers?" Over his face passed a curious look like the flick of a shadow. "Stirred up a peck of village superstition, and—but come out on the lawn and I'll show you." He was already getting up from the table, and I followed him.

"You don't need your coat," he said, opening the door.

It was very mild for December, with the full moon a plate of clear platinum in the sky, and bits of mist rolling at the bottom of the hill. Covington Reservoir gave off a silky gleam under the moon, and I could see, more than a mile away, the sharp lights of the village like loops of diamonds.

"There, you see," Paul said, stretching out his hands, "where the water of the reservoir has receded and dried up—those lines of stones?"

"It looks like a couple of roads," I said, "or what's left of them. Crossing, and then going right on into the reservoir."

"They *are* roads, old Revolutionary roads—they used to build them that way, with walls of stones on either side." He stood looking down into the hazy shine with brooding eyes. "Somewhere by that crossing, an old enemy of the family is buried—John Carver. A queer place to bury him, you'll think, but it seems he was hanged." He let his hand fall to his side. "Those roads, that grave, have lain under water for generations."

I watched the mist running like tumbleweed through the moonlight, almost as though there was something down there,

alive and coiling in the soft shine. The queer roads that ended in water, the hidden shamed grave, the empty landscape, were quiet and slightly sinister. "That's interesting," I said, "but what's it got to do with village superstition? The grave, I suppose?"

"Oh—" Paul said, and my sidewise glance at him startled me—I got somehow the impression that he was watching for something, almost that he expected to see someone move down there in the indefinite curling mists. "There's a village jingle, dating way back." He took his eyes from the roads and looked at me. "It goes something like this:

"When water dries up and is precious in the  
cup,  
When Carver grave and Crawford House  
stand face to face,  
There will be trouble in this place.'"

He gave a small impatient noise, like a grunt. "The idea being that if the reservoir ever receded enough to let Mr. Carver come up for air, all sorts of horrid things would begin to happen. Notice how quiet we are around here? The villagers all use the others road at night. They'd rather bust their springs than pass this place."

Now that he spoke of it, I felt the quiet, like a sponge that had sucked every sound from the air. "All because of a jingle?" I said.

"Oh, no!" He opened the door behind us. "Let's go in—I get tired of watching those mists run around. No—it seems since the water receded, they see unpleasant things in the bushes and so forth."

"Such as?"

"Now who knows? Let a man get a couple of drinks of the village booze in him and he could see anything." Paul went back into the living-room and stood above the fire, kneading his hands as though they were cold. "What started all this—a long time ago I had a great-great-

something-or-other who was a Judge Crawford. It seems he coveted John Carver's wife. He had Carver 'framed,' we'd call it; presided with great pleasure at his trial, and saw that he was hanged." Paul stretched his long slender body wearily as he looked at me. "Whether the judge got Carver's wife or not I don't know, but he must have found the neighborhood disagreeable in some way, because he moved promptly to New York and sold this house. It had a number of owners or renters who never stayed long—you know what happens when a place gets a bad name for any silly reason."

He put his hands up into his hair and rubbed his scalp as though his head ached. "Then they made this reservoir, eighty years or so ago, drowning the crossroads and the grave, and this house was occupied steadily with no complaints until I bought it back. I believe my unpleasant ancestor died peacefully in his bed in New York, but I really couldn't say."

"What an old wives' tale!" I said. "When Carver grave and Crawford House stand face to face, there will be trouble in this place." Of course, there's been nothing that you've noticed?"

PAUL did not speak for a moment, and when he did, it was hardly an answer. "I should hope I have enough brains not to imagine things," he said. "Well, you must be tired after your drive. I've looked your room over with the proper housewife's eye—I think you'll be comfortable."

The trip *had* tired me, and I was glad of his suggestion. He put me in a pleasant room that communicated with his, and I undressed at once and went to bed. But I did not sleep, possibly because it was a strange bed, or because I was too tired. And there was a dog howling somewhere near by, with a tiresome persistence that stretched my nerves.

Paul could not sleep either. I heard

him through the closed door between our rooms, turning on the bed with a creaking of springs, punching his pillow, giving the stifled sighs of fatigue that could not rest. Finally, after some hours, he became quiet, and I lay there listening to the everlasting howls of the dog, and the noise the wind made clattering the bare branches of the trees. I remembered that when I had been there before, occasionally in the night you could hear a car go by on the road, but now I heard nothing—apparently it was true that this road was shunned at night. What rot! I thought, turned over in bed, and was preparing myself for the hundredth time to sleep, when suddenly I jerked up on one elbow, then leaped out of bed.

The light was on in Paul's room when I got there. He sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the wall; his hands were clenched, and his face ran with sweat.

I turned his head up, so that I could look into his eyes. For a moment they did not look sane; they stared at me, blank and black. And then he shuddered.

"Get into bed," I ordered. "What was it, Paul?" I had never heard a man scream quite like that before—I never wanted to hear such a sound again. I pushed him back under the covers, and pulled the blankets up to his chin; through my fingers I could feel the deep racking shivers that shook his body. But his eyes were losing that look of black overwhelming horror.

"A nightmare," he said with a gasp. "Only a nightmare. I have them all the time."

"Of a very unpleasant sort?" If this was the kind of company he entertained at night, it was no wonder he looked such a stranger to sleep.

"Quite disagreeable," he said, forcing a grin. "Let's not talk about it."

"But something ought to be done about it." I revolved in my mind items of exercise and diet, which I would take up with

him in the morning. "I'll give you something to make you sleep."

"Please," he said. "I've been afraid to take anything by myself except mild bromides, and they don't do the trick."

"I've something in my bag that will." I gave him a moderate dose of luminol and waited by him until he was asleep, then turned off the lights, pushed his window open wider, and stood by it looking out for a moment. I was puzzled. Anyone can have a nightmare now and then as a result of physical indiscretion, but a steady diet of nightmare so that sleep becomes a hardship and terrible—

THE moon was behind a cloud, and its soft muffled light cast a haze over the lonely landscape. I remembered that the Bible said it is not good for man to be alone, and I wondered if the absence of Mary and the children hadn't something to do with Paul's nightmares. I was about to turn away and go back to bed, feeling my eyes burn from lack of sleep, when I stopped my yawning and stared. Surely something had moved, there by that clump of bushes near the house? It seemed to me that I could pick out the outline of a man who watched the house, something so set and strange in his attitude, that the skin prickled on the back of my neck. I turned my eyes away, and when I looked back, the figure was gone.

The sky was beginning to lighten in the east, and I could hear the soft dawn wind rustling dead leaves. I had imagined it, I said to myself. I was tired; my eyes were tired—some tiny temporary blot on the retina had made itself into a human likeness standing in the shadow of the trees. And yet, I went to bed not quite satisfied. It seemed to me that the figure had had a distinctness not usual when the eyes and the imagination make one up.

We both slept late the next morning. I had finished shaving and dressed

when Paul called me for breakfast, and I saw at once that he was better.

"Rob," he said, sitting down at the table, and pouring orange juice from a pitcher into my glass, "that's the first good night's sleep I've had in a month. But I suppose you doctors disapprove of that kind of sleep."

"We certainly do." I studied him thoughtfully. "If I know you, you've been working too hard on your new book. No exercise to speak of, not enough sleep even before this nightmare business started."

"True," he said, slipping bread into the toaster. "With Mary and the kids gone, there wasn't anything to do except work."

"So now your nerves are all tied up in knots. How about a holiday for the week I'm here? Is there any hard manual labor we could do outdoors—about eight hours of it every day? It wouldn't hurt me, and it's all you need."

"Sure," he said. "I've got a woodlot, up back of the house. We could cut next winter's firewood. Dull but wholesome."

"Fine." I drank my orange juice with a more comfortable feeling about Paul—a week's hard work in the open air can cure almost anything. "By the way," I said, "have you any suspicious characters in the neighborhood? When I looked out your window last night, I could have sworn there was someone there in the bushes, watching the house. It may have been purely subjective, and yet—"

Paul's face lost color. "You saw him too," he said. "That's interesting. Twice I've chased all through those bushes with a gun in my hand, but there's never anybody there."

"Either there is or there isn't," I said after a moment. "I mean, since there was nobody there, it was a trick of shadows and bushes which can be seen from your window. You have too many bushes around this house anyway—you should cut some of them down."

"Sometimes I think the house should be cut down," he said dismally, and then he smiled. "My nerves *are* in knots, aren't they?"

"Of course," I said. "You never were one to imagine things, Paul—at least, not outside your books."

I heard a key click in the lock of the back door, and looked at Paul.

"Mrs. Butts," he said. "She does my chores. I wonder what tall tales she'll have thought up overnight."

WHEN Mrs. Butts came in, I thought she didn't look the sort for tall tales, a round, dumpy, wholesome little woman.

"It's a fine day, Mr. Crawford," she said. "I had such a nice brisk walk up—I do like it when it's nice and cheerful around here."

"Who doesn't?" Paul said rather crossly. "This is my friend, Doctor Leonard, Mrs. Butts."

"How do you do, sir?" she said. "I'm sure it must be real pleasant for Mr. Crawford to have you with him."

"Pleasant for me," I said. "I'm looking forward to my week."

"Yes, indeed, sir," she said non-committally, and disappeared into a closet behind the kitchen door. When she came out, she was swallowed by an ample Mother Hubbard. "I stopped at Mrs. Andrews' on my way up. She said the dog howled something fierce last night."

"I slept like a baby," Paul said, crumbling the toast on his plate. "I heard nothing."

I looked at his face, puzzled by it—it was secret, a little angry. And why should he deny that he had heard the dog?

"There *was* a dog howling last night," I said. "Some farmer's dog, no doubt, sitting on a hilltop and yelling at the full moon."

"Of course, sir," Mrs. Butts said un-

believingly. "Well, I must be about my work."

When she left us, Paul got up from the table with an irritated shove at his chair. "Shall we go out and chop down a few trees? That sort of thing goes on all the time—you'd think the village wanted to drive me nuts."

"But she didn't say anything," I said, following him.

"No, not much," he said. "The dog that howls is supposed to be John Carver's dog, and therefore—not alive."

I took that in silence, as he opened the door and we went out into the sharp shining day. "But what nonsense it is, Paul" I said slowly, as he stopped by the cellar door and picked up the axes. "It's no wonder you have nightmares! All this village gossip—you laugh at it and ignore it when you're awake. But your unconscious looks it over, picks it up, wonders about it—and trots it out at night when you're asleep. The unconscious holds everything that's primitive and frightened in us."

"I shouldn't wonder if that isn't why I dream," he said with a brightening look.

"Of course it is." I was satisfied with the common sense of my explanations. And yet, as we walked up the bright hillside towards the woodlot, I remember that I turned and looked back at the house, and at the bushes that grew on the side where Paul's room was. It annoyed and disturbed me just a little to see that among the small spruces and clusters of rhododendrons, was nothing that could possibly be the size and shape of a man.

"YOU look a different fellow," I said, glancing over at him where he sat yawning healthily in the big wing chair. He certainly wasn't the hollow-cheeked, gaunt, nervous specimen I had found a week ago. "You're ruining all Mrs.

Butts' expectations of a Crawford doom."

"That's too bad. I feel marvelous. Lucky for me you came up, I guess. I was beginning to *believe* all that slush." He got to his feet and stood smiling down at me. "It's great to think Mary's coming home tomorrow. And the kids. I'll be a family man again."

"Better for you." I was anxious to try an experiment. Every night since I had come, I had given Paul the sleeping-tablets, and he had slept deep and well. Tonight, I intended to dose him with a harmless sugar pill. He wouldn't know the difference, but his nervous system would, and if he slept soundly, I might congratulate myself on having cured him. "It's getting late, Paul. How about bed?"

"I can do with it. We deserve it."

We put out the lights and went up to bed.

I gave him the innocuous sugar pill, and saw him swallow it, before I went to take my bath. When I came back, he was sound asleep already, with the deeply relaxed look of one who has earned his sleep.

I went to bed myself then, but I did not get to sleep at once. Almost as soon as I had crawled between the sheets, the dog began to howl, somewhere off in the distance. It was the most mournful, irritating night noise I have ever heard, sometimes far away, sometimes quite near the house. It had howled every night since I had come, and once or twice it had sounded so very close I had got out of bed to look, but had never caught a glimpse of it. I hardly wondered, as I lay and listened to it, that the superstitious villagers said it wasn't alive. The sound rose and fell with a desolate unearthly wildness that made the spine tingle. It's starting early tonight, I thought, looking at the illuminated dial of the clock by the bed. Wondering why somebody hadn't shot the animal long ago, I dug my head into the

bedclothes, and tired from hard exercise in the open, was soon asleep.

I don't know what it was that waked me, whether sound or motion, but I sat up with my heart thundering, as you often do when shocked awake. The house was still; I could not hear even the howling of the dog, but some pressure in my nerves, stronger than common sense, warned me that something was wrong. I slid out of bed at once, and went into Paul's room. The bedclothes had been thrown half off the bed, as though he had jumped out in a hurry, but the room was empty.

The hall outside our rooms was dark and no light showed in the bottom of the house. I shouted, "Paul! Paul!" several times, and heard nothing but my own voice falling into the flat silence. Some impulse pulled me to the hall window. I saw Paul at once. He was walking down across the field toward the old roads; in the light of the waning moon, his shadow drifted beside him over the frozen ruts. I watched him for a second longer before I realized what it was that puzzled me in his gait. He was not awake. He was walking in his sleep, to fulfill some plan his sleeping mind had made.

I ran back to my room for shoes, hurried down the stairs, and snatched my overcoat from the foyer closet. There is always grave danger of accident to a sleep-walker, and I was afraid that he might walk into the reservoir or injure himself in the stony fields.

The air was bitterly sharp, and so still that I could hear the soft, muffled thunder of a train that was miles away. A few flakes of snow began to drift down as I ran quickly across the dim field, my feet slipping on the hard hummocks and ridges. A fold in the land hid Paul from me at first, and when I saw him he was well along on the old road, walking steadily toward the crossroads as though he meant to



meet someone and was late for the appointment.

As soon as I reached the fairly smooth surface of the road, I ran faster, and caught up with him quickly. I took hold of his arm gently, and said in a low voice, "Paul, Paul—"

A single convulsive shiver ran over him as the chain with sleep snapped, and his eyes looked at me. His jaw dropped, and his eyes expanded with a black terror—there was a worse look in them than I have ever seen in the eyes of a dying man. I saw at once that he was going to faint, and I was ready when he gave a single choked cry and slid against me, his knees loosening.

I don't know how I got him up to the house.

Paul was a big man, and an unconscious body is dead weight, but I managed it somehow—mainly because there was no help, and I knew I had to. I got him up to his bed, wrapped him in blankets, and succeeded in pouring some brandy between his teeth.

"You're all right, Paul," I said, as soon as his eyes opened. "You're here with me. You're safe."

The blank look of terror persisted in them for a moment and then they cleared. "Lord," he said with an effort, "that was the worst yet. Was I dreaming again? Was that all?"

"I found you down by the old roads. You were sleep-walking."

He turned his head on the pillow, and stared at the wall. "This can't go on," he said in a voice that dragged with misery. "Up to now, all I've dreamed was that something was after me. I could never see it clearly—all I knew was it hated me and meant to harm me. Always, at the last moment as we were about to come to grips, I would wake up."

He closed his hands over his eyes. "This time," he said, "I thought I was

walking down the old road. There was someone walking in front of me, but I couldn't see him well because he had a hood over his head." He broke off. "All the while, I felt the most awful cold helpless terror, but I couldn't seem to go back to help myself in any way. Then he stopped, waiting for me to come up to him, and as I came abreast of him, he turned and I saw his face—"

"What was it like?" I said, watching him closely. He was clay-colored, and the pupils of his eyes had expanded until the black almost swallowed the irises.

"I don't know," he said. "It was terribly distorted. It was very dark with congested blood—blood had run down from his nose, and the eyes were almost starting out of the head. There was a piece of rope about his neck with the knot tied under one ear. Then he put out his hand toward me—" He moved in the bed with a low sigh. "That's all I remember, thank God."

I went to my medicine kit, filled a hypodermic and brought it back to the bed. "We'll talk it over in the morning," I said. "I want you to go to sleep now."

I SAT down beside him then, and I waited until he fell into the deep, drugged sleep. I was very uneasy and puzzled. This weird senseless nightmare, that had grown to such power that it had driven him asleep out of his bed—Remembering his description of the man in his dream, I reflected that his unconscious mind had made up a very faithful picture of a man who had died by hanging.

Whatever was wrong with Paul, exercise had not cured it, nor could drugs be anything more than a temporary and dangerous makeshift. I was sitting there in the cold bedroom, puzzling over ways and means to help him, when suddenly under the window, with an abruptness that made

the hair rise on the back of my head, the howling of the dog started up.

I put out the light and went quickly to the window. I was bound that I was going to see it this time. For a moment blinded because I had been in the light, I seemed to peer out at a wall of dim, dark plush, and then details began to appear. I saw them almost at once through the lightly falling snow—the man standing half in and half out of the shadow of the stumpy bushes, the dog sitting beside him, the green light of his eyes raised toward the window.

I have never been able to forget the feeling that came over me then—a feeling inside me as though something cowered and shivered. There was about the pair of them an indescribable air of menace that held me like an insect on a pin. And it was a menace that you couldn't meet with bluster and a gun—they did not mean to burgle the house—that was not their purpose. I don't know how long I stood there, with uncontrollable shivers creeping on my flesh, but at last I was able to wrench myself away. I pulled down the shade and stumbled through the blackness of the room to the lamp. As the light went on again, the cold wicked howling of the dog started up once more. I looked at Paul on the bed; he slept deeply without stirring.

I locked both our doors that opened into the hall, and moved a chair so that I had a view of his room through the open communicating door, and would be able to see him if he attempted to get up. At least they don't seem able to get into the house, I thought; that's a good thing. When I lighted a cigarette, I saw that my fingers were shaking. I sat there, smoking many cigarettes, listening to the howling of the dog. It stopped at the first streak of dawn.

When daylight had begun to pale the lamp, I got up, switched off the light, and raised the shades. Burning-eyed, stiff and

tired, I looked out at a clear bright day. The snow had ended and the lawn and woods were spread with fresh white. I stared down at the lawn directly beneath the windows.

The light film of snow was smooth and clean; there were no footprints, of either dog or man. But I had not expected there would be.

PAUL looked hazy-eyed and weary, and he had eaten only half his breakfast. "Oh, I agree with you—there's no use trying to live in this place any longer." He pushed the plate away irritably. "But I hate to give up my house that I like, just because a couple of miserable shadows—" He rested his head on his hands. "Mary isn't going to enjoy being bundled off again as soon as she gets home."

"She will, after I've talked to her." The phone rang, and I got up to answer it. "I have an idea that the villagers are right, and that when rains fill the reservoir again and cover up the grave, this will be a safe place once more—you can come back then."

"At home, after the rains," he said with a sour grin. "Perhaps."

When I came back to the table, I said, "Listen, Paul, a patient of mine—it sounds like an emergency operation—"

"I heard," he said. "Of course you'll be starting for the city at once—"

"But I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Nothing ever happens in daylight," he said. "Mary will be home about noon, and we'll leave then. I'll have her call you up when we get to the city, so you can reassure her about my sanity." He got up from the table. "Of course you must go, Rob, but you're not to worry about me. I'll be all right."

I stood looking at him doubtfully, torn between two duties. "If you do just as we planned, you *should* be all right—"

He helped me pack my bags, and came out with me to the car. "I hate to scuttle away like a cowardly dog," he said, frowning. "But I don't dare take any risk, with Mary and the children in the house—" He looked about him at the bright pouring sunshine and the crisp snow. "It seems unbelievable."

I knew what he meant—in the sane daylight, what had happened last night seemed night-born, dream-born, not real.

"But you know it isn't," I said, starting the car. "You or Mary call me as soon as you get in."

My last glimpse showed him standing in the doorway, the big house looming behind him as though it were about to swallow him alive. I thought as I drove along that I really should have got a definite promise from him that he would not spend another night in the place—but I was quite sure, remembering his words and the way he loved his family, that he would not dare take such a chance with Mary and the children there, and went on with easier mind.

My patient gave me a desperately anxious day. I took him to the hospital and slept there that night in order to be ready for the early operation; and it was not really until afternoon of the next day when the operation was successfully over and he had come out of the anesthetic, that I seemed to open my eyes and look around again.

Every doctor knows that state of mind when he's engaged in a hand-to-hand battle with death—there simply is no room for anything else. I went home, had my lunch, and sat down for a moment with the afternoon paper.

It was not until that instant that I thought of Paul again. The small headline, sandwiched in between the bursts of war news, leaped out at me: *Paul Crawford Murdered*. The paper shook in my

hands, and a shock of horror burst in me like a bomb. I dropped the paper, snatched it up again, and read:

"Paul Crawford, well known modern novelist, author of the best sellers, 'Mrs. Grundy' and 'Strange Voyage,' was found dead today near his home in Covington under circumstances which indicated he had been murdered. The body was found by Mrs. Crawford who had returned from California with her children a day later than she had anticipated—"

Poor Mary, I thought with a choking rush of pity. I knew what had happened. Paul had heard from Mary that she would be a day late, and stubborn, angry at being forced out of his own house, he had determined that he would stay just one more night. Perhaps he had locked all the doors, all the windows, perhaps he had done other things that he thought would keep him safe from things that walk in the dark, but nothing had been enough. I stared down again at the clear black print of the paper.

"Mr. Crawford's body lay at a junction of old Revolutionary roads which had been revealed by the drying up of Covington Reservoir in the recent drought. The body had been badly mauled by a wild animal, although none have been known to be in the vicinity in years. The case is further complicated by the fact that about Mr. Crawford's neck was a rope of a type said to have been used for the execution of criminals generations ago. The inquest will be held on Wednesday morning at ten o'clock."

I knew what the result of the inquest would be, almost as though I were there to hear the foreman of the jury say, "We find the deceased met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

But they were known to me.