

TERBOR TALES



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Number Two

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CHAPTER ONE

*There in that awful beauty mart, I
saw my wife a willing prey to lust—
while a dancing corpse clapped
grisley hands in the harbor of Mad-
man's Isle!*

Pleasure Cruise—to Hell

AT FIRST I was conscious only of the lulling sound of lapping water and the gentle swaying of a ship at anchor. It seemed to me that I had been listening to that sound for hours,

by Donald Graham

*Weird Mystery and Chilling Terror Fill
the Pages of This Stirring
Novelette*



vaguely fighting to pull myself out of that semi-comatose condition that borders the conscious and the unconscious state. Then, with a growl, I was bolt upright in the bed, staring blindly into the darkness about me as my heart beat a rapid tattoo in my breast. At the time my befogged mind did not know what caused my fear, but sheer animal terror had me in its hold as I swung my feet to the floor and sat gripping the edge of my bunk, my head pounding painfully. Then, slow-

ly, the darkness, the quiet, and the rocking motion of the yacht helped to still my unstrung nerves. The whole thing was but a bad dream, a vividly realistic nightmare. But where were the other members of the party?

I stepped out of my dark cabin and into the dimly lit corridor which was flanked on each side by two double cabins. I strode to one end of the passageway and threw open the door of the engine room—beneath me, at the foot of a flight of steps, two Diesel engines lay side by side, silent, like giants sleeping. The other cabins

were empty as I went through them.

"Helen! Doris! Tom!" I shouted, terror again surging over me.

I retraced my tracks to the other end of the corridor on the run, hurtling through the galley, dining room and lounge—all were empty and in great disorder. At the end of the lounge, up a short flight of steps, the door of the wheelhouse loomed. I took the steps almost at a bound, flung the door open and froze in my stride, transfixed, my breath coming in gulping fear. It was all true, then! It hadn't been a dream! A sob burst from my constricted throat.

Sagging upon the wheel was the body of a man. His head was hooked over the top of the wheel while his arms, outflung between the spokes at each side, were reaching before him. His once-blond hair was now a clotted mass of violent death. Supported as he was by the brace of the wheel, he remained in a semi-upright posture, his crumpled legs rubber-like in death. To me, in that terrible moment, he seemed the devil's marionette dancing on the strings of horror, dead arms outstretched, groping to embrace his prey. As the clean white yacht rolled softly with the swell, the wheel turned slowly from side to side making the corpse's limp legs execute hell's own macabre dance in the crimson pool at his feet.

I do not know how long I stood there, gruesomely fascinated by this profane spectre, my eyes held by the hypnotic gliding of the dead man's body and legs. But I do remember that the impenetrable darkness that surrounded the yacht seemed to be pressing in as though to crush it. Only the glimmering battery-lights of the ship's interior, combined with the eerie red gleam from the ship's port side and the green starboard light, cast a small halo over the surrounding water. And then the throbbing in my head and the bells in my ears grew louder and louder as the wheelhouse filled with a deep red

mist and I sagged to the floor in a coma.

IT WAS as though my mind and body had retreated from any further shock by going into a state of semi-paralysis. As in a dream I relived the weeks of happiness that came before this horror. I saw again the expression of delight that came over Helen's face when I suggested we spend our vacation in Florida with my brother Tom and his wife Doris. Helen and I had been married only a short while and this was to be our first vacation together. Then, too, I hadn't seen Tom for several years, so the whole thing worked beautifully. Tom lived in Miami, and from the moment of our arrival we were treated as a king and queen. There was boating and swimming in the mornings, gay luncheons and cocktail parties in the afternoons, while in the evenings we went for quiet drives in the moonlight, danced at one of the hotels or tried our luck at the Casino. It was like a second honeymoon for Helen and me. And during this time we met a third couple, Ken and Hilda Ryder, who were great sports and treated us with exceptional kindness. And it was Ken who suggested the biggest thrill of all—a chartered yacht to sail among the key islands and perhaps go as far as the Ten Thousand Islands off the Southern coast. The suggestion was received with enthusiasm, and Tom chartered a small vessel that would accommodate all of us.

The first week was an even greater joy than any of us had expected. Ken, who knew the waters well, mapped our course to take in the most interesting places. But then, on a rainy morning at the end of the first week, the motors began to give us trouble. We were at lunch, I remembered, when the captain went into the wheelhouse to speak to the helmsman, his face grimly set to hide his alarm. Ken, too, acted worried, and when I questioned him later he told me that the barometer

was falling rapidly which meant a bad storm, that we were held away from the mainland by treacherous reefs, and that with motors going bad and no harbor in sight we might expect anything.

All of us tried to keep our alarm from the girls, but that was almost impossible. It was a grim party that rode out that afternoon on a welling, glowering sea, motors wheezing and the yacht rolling drunkenly like a wounded thing. Then, miraculously, off our port bow an island loomed. It was the helmsman who sighted it and called its position. We sailed cautiously in closer, the island slowly rising out of the haze, and I noticed a tall spire jutting into the sky from the top of the island's central hill. I turned to Ken to comment, and I was shocked to see the deathly white pallor of his face and the way his lips kept repeating in a whisper:

"Madman's Island! Madman's Island!"

"Ken!" I cried, shaking his arm. "What is it? What's the matter?"

But he didn't answer me, so I turned toward Tom. Tom, too, seemed strangely abstracted, a worried frown creasing his forehead.

"This is bad, Jim, bad," Tom said, shaking his head. "I wish I could tell you all I know about this place."

We were abruptly interrupted as Ken suddenly rushed for the wheelhouse, slamming the door open.

"Keep away from that island!" he almost screamed. "Keep away, I tell you!" He staggered into the wheelhouse and grabbed the wheel, spinning it crazily, shouting in a voice of hysteria, "That's Madman's Island! Didn't I tell you to keep away?"

A member of the crew grappled with him as Tom and I jumped forward to help. He fought with the fury of the demented, but the three of us managed to get him back into the lounge where we forced him into a chair. After that he

gave up struggling, sobs racking his frame. The girls stood at one end of the lounge room, their faces white and strained with fear. Then, slowly, Ken raised his head and looked at us, his face and lips ashen, his eyes unnaturally bright, and when he spoke his voice had the intense sibilance combined with the quiet prediction of a prophet. How I wish we had listened to him!

"I tell you now," he said in a whisper, "that anyone who anchors at Madman's Island braves the horrors of the deepest hell, jeopardizes the very soul he treasures, and enters a place from which *no sane thing has ever returned!*" At that, he lowered his head and spoke no more.

THE group in the cabin was a frozen tableau, white-lipped, motionless, silent, and it burned into my brain a picture that I shall never erase, for it has been seared there with an acid more lasting than any known to man.

Then I noticed the captain's hands clenching and relaxing, the muscles in his jaws tightening spasmodically, as he concealed his dreadful foreboding with a mask of determination. Suddenly he threw his heavy shoulders back and shouted a command in much too loud a voice, as though he would reassure his courage by his own strength. But all of us knew that physical strength can never successfully defy things beyond the ken of man. . . .

The anchor chain rattled out with an eerie clanking that suggested the reluctance of every link to hold the vessel in this cove, and the failing Diesel engines ground to a stop as the tired ship came to rest.

Everyone, including the captain and the three members of the crew, huddled in the lounge as dusk began to settle. Ken was still slumped in his chair as the captain began the history of Madman's Island.

"The story is short and ugly," he said,

"and there are some who believe it; I'm not saying I don't. But anyway, over a hundred years ago a wealthy Southern family found themselves with a child who was mad. At first it was easy to take care of him, but when he grew up the trouble began. So they bought this island and built a large stone house on it for him to live in. You can see the stone spire still standing. They left him here on the island with several husky "servants" and decided to forget all about it. The madman lived here for a number of years, and then one year when the provision boat came the house was empty. Then, one by one, they found the members of the madman's household wandering about the island, all of them horribly tortured and maimed, and every one of them a frothing lunatic. The mad owner never was found—some say he's still here.

"But this much is known: once a party of young people came here to explore the place and only one of them returned—a young girl who returned mad in a way that I can't talk about. Then the Government stepped in and razed the place from one end to the other, but the only thing they found was the body of another young girl, horribly mutilated. She had evidently been tortured for months: her fingers and toes had been cut off, her breasts were amputated, her eyes burned out and her tongue ripped out by sheer force.

"No possible hiding place could be found, nor any signs of a place of torture, so the Government said the body must have been transported to this isolated place. Anyway, they tore down the old stone house on the hill and that closed the matter. But there are people who say that many of the yachting parties claimed missing at sea are really the victims of this madman, who is supposed to have gathered other lunatics about him. Others say that they have seen lights on the island—but nobody ever comes to investigate. Madman's Island is left very much

alone. Seamen avoid it like a plague."

There was silence for a moment after the captain had finished, then Ken raised his head.

"Whether human agents or supernatural," he said, "violence and death are here, and it is best to leave the place strictly alone."

"Oh, come out of it!" I exploded, angry at the chills that were running up and down my spine. "This is all pure coincidence which has been strengthened by legend, gossip and superstition. Maybe there is an old story; maybe some bodies were found here; maybe...."

The words I was about to utter withered and died in my constricted throat as a horrible wailing scream mounted into the night air, climbing ever higher to reach the crescendo of torture incarnate, then was stifled like the flame of a candle suddenly extinguished. Following that scream came the chattering, howling laugh of a madman, bubbling with fiendish delight and deranged pleasure. After it had stopped I was conscious that Helen's slim body was pressed close to me, her trembling form hugging mine for protection.

"Oh, Jim; Jim, dear," she whispered sobbingly, over and over.

CHAPTER TWO

Hosts of the Dancing Corpse

THE captain's rumbling oath was the first sound to break the quivering silence that followed. He strode over to the gun locker and jammed his key into the padlock, slamming the doors open.

"Catch!" he commanded, and tossed revolvers to each member of the crew. Then he handed one to each of the male passengers, but Ken waved his aside.

"It wouldn't do any good," Ken almost whined, "against *them*."

"By _____," the captain swore, "if anything comes near this ship, devil, mad-

man or hobgoblin, I'll let so much moonlight through 'em they'll feel like a piece of Irish lace!"

My heart went out to the captain who refused to be beaten by the threat of supernatural evil even though, as was evident, he more than half believed the gruesome legend. As for myself, I was forced to believe the evidence of my senses, and certainly no human being had uttered that nerve-shattering wail that came from an isolated, obviously deserted island. And in that second after the captain had spoken a jittering scream ripped through the ship *from right beneath the porthole!* *And from the opposite side of the yacht another bubbling howl answered! We were surrounded!*

The captain whirled with the sound and his gun blazed out into the night, only to be answered by a chorus of derisive screeches as the ship began to rock violently as though a hundred chattering apes were rolling it in their hairy arms. But the thunder of the captain's gun seemed to give us all courage—there was force and strength in the reverberating explosion.

"Quick!" I shouted. "To the midship cabins—we'll stand a better chance against them in the narrow passageway."

I never let Helen out of my grasp until we were safe within our small cabin. Ken, who seemed to have taken on new life and thrown off his paralyzing fear, followed us in, pushing his wife, Hilda, before him. Tom and his wife Doris ran into their cabin across from ours, the captain following them, while the three crew members crouched in the doorway of the engine room.

We didn't have long to wait; no sooner had we gained the cabins than the rocking of the ship stopped and heavy bodies could be heard squirming over the sides of the vessel. I can't put into words the way the seconds dragged while we waited silently, nerves snapping, for the on-

slaught of this terrorizing menace. I remember counting the thumps as each additional body heaved itself up on the deck, its wet bare feet making a slapping sound on the canvas as it joined the others waiting. Then, when all were present, the mob of madmen set up an ear-wracking bellow that must have shaken the heavens and rocked the foundations of hell. Suddenly, tearing and smashing everything before them, they burst screaming into the wheelhouse, blasted through the door of the lounge room and swamped into the fore part of the ship like the yowling pack from hell's nethermost regions that they were.

I'll never forget the terror that was in Helen's scream nor the gasp of horror that went up from the rest of the company as those apparitions came upon us. Momentarily we were stunned. Their eyes! They were the eyes of madness personified, of dementia incarnate, glowering hate, lust, cruelty and vicious desire. Great, shaggy, tangled masses of filthy hair covered their entire bodies giving them the appearance of misshapen beasts, while from their heavy-tusked, screaming mouths a soap-like froth spewed over whiskered faces and matted chests. And with this wave of nightmare creatures there came a stomach-turning stench of utter foulness that permeated the ship at once.

A giant among them, hurling the others aside in his insane fury, gained the door of the passageway first, his huge bulk blocking the entire frame and his roaring throat shaking the very walls. He paused there for a moment, and in that moment the paralyzing panic that had come over me passed. I raised my heavy revolver and its blast sent the warm blood of courage flowing through my veins again. The thunder of my gun seemed to awaken the others, and a very holocaust of gunfire blazed down the passage at the madmen. But with the first shot the giant bounded

forward and raced toward us, the others tumbling after in riotous frenzy.

I remember emptying my revolver into the howling pack and then hurling the useless weapon into the face of the nearest one. He whirled and jumped for our doorway, crashing into the room at full tilt. As he crossed the threshold I rocked him back on his heels with a smash to the jaw that I felt straight down to my ankles. There was the strength of ten men in that blow for an unholy fear had suddenly seized me—I had shot point blank at several of the creatures without the slightest effect; I couldn't have missed. *And I knew for a fact that the bullets in my gun were not blanks.* The wood and moulding of the passageway had flown into splinters, but not one of these creatures had fallen from a bullet. My solid jab to the creature's jaw seemed to have some effect, however, and he was momentarily stopped, plucky little Helen smashed a chair across his head. In the next instant, though, he was on me again and we were locked in a bone-crushing embrace, staggering drunkenly about the small cabin. The nauseating reek of filth and decay that came from his body almost made my stomach turn. As we struggled about the cabin I saw Ken holding his own with another of the beasts.

Then, in a flash, the creature hurled me against the side of the cabin with a force that must have split the wood. Then, as I staggered for him again, his heavy fist slashed across my face stunning me, and in the same instant a crushing blow from behind exploded a meteor in my brain that showered into a million sparks and faded to a sinking blackness. As I went down I heard Helen's scream.

IT WAS when I had awakened from this period of unconsciousness that I couldn't believe it all had really happened. The quiet, deserted ship, the frantic search for Helen and my companions, the

disordered rooms and broken furniture, the gruesome corpse who held the wheel—all these things told me that it had been no nightmare, that it really had happened, and that sickening realization stunned me for a time while I lived again in my delirious mind the horror that was upon us.

I don't know what brought me out of that second faint in the wheelhouse, but it must have been the frantic crying of my brain: Helen! Helen! *Helen!* For suddenly the red mist cleared away and I dragged myself shakily to my feet. The yacht was still deserted, its light dully glowing into the darkness, and the dancing corpse still held his watch at the wheel.

When I came to this time my mind was functioning normally again, and with cold deliberation I tried to form a plan of action. It was obvious that the others had been taken ashore, prisoners, to some cunningly hidden den of the beast-creatures—oh, how I fought to keep my mind from wondering what they were doing to Helen! My first objective, of course, must be to find the subterranean dwelling of the madmen—it was obvious that they had no structure above ground. But how? And why had I been left behind? The last question was much easier to answer: I had been overlooked, lying hidden as I was in the lower bunk. But perhaps . . . and then every muscle in my body stiffened as though in response to an electric shock!

I heard the sound of a hairy body dragging itself over the side of the ship, and then the wet slapping of his feet on the deck. In a flash I was back in the deeper shadows, my hand fumbling for the door to the map closet. I knew what the creature had come for—*me!* I heard him thrashing about in the sleeping cabins, searching every corner, and then I heard him blunder through the other rooms, finally to enter the wheelhouse. By

that time I was securely hidden in the closet, and the grunt of fierce disappointment that he gave could only mean that my guess had been right. I heard him step out of the wheelhouse and lower himself over the side. I counted up to ten, and then I was out on deck too. I could see him swimming ahead, making clumsily for the shore, and in a second I was in the water too, silently trailing him. It was my only hope of finding the retreat of the monsters.

He blundered up the trail that led to the top of the hill where the ruins of the old house were, heedless of noise, shambling with great awkward strides. Why he should make for the house I didn't know; it had been dynamited by the Coast Guard and even the rambling old cellars of the place were filled with rock and debris. But when we got to the ruins he skirted them until he came to the massive old chimney that could be seen far out at sea. Then, with the agility of an ape, the creature ran up the side of the chimney as a monkey would run up a stick. At the top he paused for a minute in the moonlight, then lowered himself into the chimney and disappeared from sight. So that was it! I had found the entrance.

CHAPTER THREE

Lair of the Demented Ones

FOR a second I hesitated, my mind a ferment of dread—what awful trap might await me in the labyrinthine burrows of a cult of madmen, half human, half beast? What unimagined horrors might not be found there? But then the thought of Helen and Tom and Doris came to me, and I cursed myself for being a coward.

Walking to the base of the chimney I found a series of steel rungs set into the stone. Whether they had always been there or not I did not know, but I was

up them almost as fast as the creature before me. At the top I found a similar set of rungs on the inside of the chimney, and with a prayer for strength, I started down. I do not know how far I descended into that black well, but it must have been many times the distance of the external portion of the chimney. I had the feeling that I must be reaching the very center of the hill on which the old house had stood when from below I heard a confused sound of rumbling cries and scurrying movements. Proceeding cautiously I found that the chimney suddenly widened into a small room, and as the sounds I had heard before welled increasingly to the tumultuous pitch of hell's confusion, I found my feet suddenly on a cement floor.

It is impossible for me to describe the surge of terror that snapped my nerves and roiled my brain as I stood before that doorway to unimaginable horror. The fetid stench of the beast-men filled the air with a convulsing odor of rottenness, nausea and decay, but worst of all was the unending riot of sound that blasted through the darkness. That chaos was a mind-shattering jumble of gurgling, low-pitched growls, bubbling laughter and chattering screams. And in the background could be heard a chorus of sobs, wails and moans that were feminine in tone but inhuman in expression, as though they formed the minor melody to the ear-splitting major theme of the devil's symphony—a symphony of evil, hate, lust and pain.

As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I saw a faint glimmer of light at one side of the room in which I stood. I cautiously stepped over to this doorway and saw that a long curving stone hallway ran past it—a hallway made of bricks and cement, dimly lighted at intervals by kerosene lamps. As I stood there hidden in the darkness I heard a storm of noise coming from one end of the corridor, and

then my eyes bulged in my head and my limbs stiffened in horror at the sight that came rushing upon me.

Screaming and waving her arms, a nude young girl came racing down the hall while behind her a hairy beast bounded in pursuit. They were going to pass directly by my doorway, and as they came I saw that the man-beast held a heavy black lash in his hand. He was beating her unmercifully, the vicious whip crashing upon her at every stride, flailing her back, breast and abdomen with cruelly curling strokes. Her slender body was a mass of ugly red welts and bloody cuts where the whip had fallen, and even her neck and face showed frayed and bleeding skin. But as they passed the door and disappeared down the corridor a nauseating knowledge sickened my mind—the girl had not been wailing and screaming in pain but had been *screaming with mad laughter until the tears had run down her face!* I had never seen the girl before, but I knew that even years afterward I would shudder at the memory of her open-mouthed face, wet with the blood of mutilation and streaming with the tears of insane mirth.

And that one scene, when the shock of mind-nausea had passed, snapped my last vestige of mental control. I became a wildman maddened at the thought of Helen being a prisoner in this degraded hell, crazed by the dreadful wonder of what they were doing to her, *or already had done!* With a whining scream of fury and desperation that must have outdone any other wild bellow in this subterranean sink-hole of madness, I leaped into the tunnel and raced down its winding length, no plan in my mind, my only crazed desire to find Helen and save her or die in the attempt.

Suddenly I skidded to a stop as I noticed a series of stout wooden doors along the wall at my right. I threw myself against several of them, but found them

locked; finally I came upon one which was set with iron bars and which swung ponderously inward as I shoved against it. The small stone cell into which I rushed was empty, but opposite the door was a small window through which light shone. I lunged across to the window and gazed through into a great, cavernous room large enough to have contained a whole house, its stone floor a hundred feet below me, its huge expanse brilliantly lighted by hundreds of kerosene lamps. It was a few seconds before my eyes became adjusted to the glare, and when the scene came in focus my jaw relaxed in gaping horror. The utter hellishness of the whole thing made me doubt my faculties, my mind a riot of wonder and revulsion.

AROUND the walls of that enormous dungeon hall were six or eight large cages into which were packed, like animals, between forty and sixty young girls, some of whom were dressed in filmy underwear while the rest were completely nude. But the ultimate horror was not this inhuman spectacle—rather it was in the faces and postures of the girls themselves. I have never seen utter lust and licentiousness expressed in so many ways before—every young girl in those cages was a raving, lust-mad fiend. Their lips drooled with passion and their arms stretched through the bars as they voiced every obscene endearment that came to their inflamed minds. They stretched and curved their lithe young bodies in every imaginable way in an attempt to get the attention of any man in the room. But most soul-wracking of all was to hear their seemingly inhuman sobs and moans of desire. It was then that I understood where the girlish wailing and screaming had come from. With an effort I examined the faces of several of them and saw that they had once been clean young faces, beautiful and pure—but now. . . .

And then my eyes fell on the figures of

my brother Tom and the captain lying apparently unconscious at the other end of the room, their hands and feet roped. I looked about feverishly for a sign of Helen or any of the others in the party but they were not present. Then a scream ripped from my throat as I realized fully the true horror of the whole scene—the shaggy, hair covered beast-men who shambled about the room below, bubbling and chattering and completely indifferent to the hell that surrounded them; the cages of pathetic, naked girls with their crying moans and crazed desires; all my friends prisoners in a giant cave at the center of a mountain on a deserted island; *the awful absence of the only girl I would ever love!* The true horror of Madman's Island came over me then. But my savage yells went unheeded in that madhouse of noise. Then my whole body stiffened and every nerve jumped as I heard a voice behind me.

"So glad you came," it said. "We were expecting you; you will enjoy our entertainment!"

I whirled about and saw a man outside the barred door. *It was Ken Ryder, our cruise companion!*

"Ken!" I gasped. "*In God's name how did you . . . !*" My question died in my throat as the horrible suspicion I had became a certainty by the look on his face. I hurled myself at the door with a savage growl but it was locked and he stepped out of arm's reach, the key in his hand. I shook the door and hurled myself against it, but it held as though made of iron.

"You fool!" he sneered, his eyes blazing with an unnatural light and his voice ringing with the egotism that comes from a drug-crazed mind. "The whole lot of you are fools; you did whatever I told you." He threw back his head and began to laugh wildly for a few seconds.

"Now that it's all over," he boasted, "you might as well know that it was *I*

who brought you here. *I* suggested the trip; you all accepted. *I* plotted the course of the ship wherever *I* wanted; everyone agreed. It was *I* who put emery powder in the bearings of the engines when we were off the coast of Madman's Island—*my* island. Of course, when we had no other choice but to land *I* put up the biggest protest of all; that was to increase the dramatic effect. And don't think the storm had anything to do with it—that was accidental—we would have landed here anyway."

I beat on the bars of the door and cursed him in my fury, but he only laughed the louder, glorying in his supremacy.

"Madman's Island," he gloated, "is my greatest achievement. When I needed a hideout for my . . . er, business, I merely revived an old legend, frightened all you fools away with a few murders and atrocities, and then relied on gossip and superstition to do the rest.

"And it worked—no one ever comes here; but if a stray party does show up on occasion they are very easily persuaded to leave immediately by my so-called madmen."

"In the name of sanity," I gasped, "what are they?"

But he paid no attention to my question. "It may interest you to know," he went on in a hard voice, "that my reasons for bringing you here were many. First, I wanted revenge for an old score, as yet unsettled; second, to protect myself I had to prevent a second mistake on the part of your brother; third, the emotion which you fools call 'love' had something to do with it."

At those words a sudden fury came over him and he almost screamed in his unnatural rage. "Do you realize that your brother is a member of the State Department of Florida; that he traced down and wrecked Hilda's illegal business in Florida, sending her to prison for five years;

that he was investigating my traffic in girls between the United States and South America and would have advised the Federal Bureau of Investigation if he got any evidence; that his suspicions were centered about this very island, my perfect hideaway!"

Ryder paused for a few minutes, breathing heavily. Then he went on in a more quiet voice, "Don't you suppose Hilda wanted revenge? Do you think I would let him wreck my business and send me to a Federal penitentiary? We both planned to 'get' him. It wasn't hard; he knew neither of us by sight so we set out to meet him with this cruise the final part of the plan—no one from that cruise would ever be seen again, the ship would be destroyed. That you happened to be with them was an accident: we had to take you along. But on the trip down I became fond of your little Helen. She added pleasure to the plan."

The evil lust in his tone made my blood run cold and I attacked the door again, swearing wildly. Then I tried to beg off, to offer him all the money I had and all the money I could get if he would let us go, but his cold, snake-like eyes merely blazed back at me, emotionless and dead.

"You may expect only these favors," he grated. "For yourself, death; for your brother, the agony of watching his wife go slowly mad with lust, and then his own death after seeing her sold to the South American trade; for your Helen, the priceless gift of my love—for a few weeks. These are the last words you will hear from me." Then he spun on his heel and was gone.

With a groan I sagged to the floor, sobbing, my heart suddenly dead within me. *And then I heard Helen's scream!*

CHAPTER FOUR

Passion by the Ounce

I JUMPED for the window, unable to keep from watching, no matter how the sight might torture me. Helen and

Doris were being dragged into the cavernous room by two of the beast-men while the dope-crazed Ryder and his evil assistant, Hilda, stood grinning at the girls' wild struggles and pitiful screams. My heart stopped beating for a second when I saw one of the monsters smash a heavy hand across Helen's mouth and then hurl her on the floor at the feet of Ryder, who roared with laughter. Doris was then thrown beside Helen, and the two monsters went to help their fellows who were busy hauling the huge cages from the room and down a long passageway at one side of the room. More of the beast-men were passing to and from the room. The air was heavy with their foul pungent odor. It stung my nostrils like fire.

"Meet my merchandise," Ryder sneered, bowing to Helen and Doris and pointing to the disappearing cages.

But his words made no difference to the poor things in the cages, for the enticing words and gestures continued with an almost added abandon. Helen and Doris refused to look, keeping their eyes averted from the degrading sight, and this seemed to infuriate the demented man.

"String up these modest fools!" he roared to two of his henchmen, who dragged the girls across the floor to one side of the room.

Paralyzed by the sight, a prayer and a curse came to my lips at the same time, and I saw lovely Doris and beautiful Helen bound to some iron rings that were embedded in the wall. Then, after they were helplessly bound, Ryder strode forward and wildly started to rip their clothes off with a savage, lustful fury, and at length they were naked but for some shreds of underclothing that hung in silken ribbons, cowering before the avid eyes that ran over them.

Ryder stood insolently in front of Helen's nude figure, his cruel eyes suddenly alight with lecherous desire as he gazed at her rose-pink skin and slender

beauty. The firm up-thrust of her breasts and the slim, well-rounded hips that curved down to slender, shapely legs seemed to inflame him. He went over to Helen and caressed her in a lingering, vile way, his hands running slowly over her abdomen, back and thighs, her screams and attempts to avoid him only seeming to delight him the more. I felt the blood pounding in my temples.

"I told your darling husband that you are to be my lover," he sneered, "and so you shall be—for a while. After that, Rio for both of you. Or would you prefer Buenos Aires?"

Helen and Doris both screamed and began to plead with him when he said this, but he only went into convulsions of laughter again. By this time all the cages had been removed from the room and it was easy to hear what was said below, all the creatures having gone with them, Hilda following.

"You won't mind that life," he taunted the girls, "after you've had my special treatment. You saw those girls in the cages. They've been here only two months and look at them now. Do you suppose they'll complain? They'll be the last ones to want to leave that life; it's the only thing they can think of now. And you will be like them soon. Each day you will receive an injection of cantharides in slowly increasing amounts. At the end of two months your minds will be so permanently affected that the use of cantharides will no longer be necessary. Part of your brains will be permanently destroyed. You'll be wild, raving, lust-crazed merchandise for the South American markets, and each one of you will net me between five hundred and a thousand dollars!"

He turned to Helen. "My dear, you shall both receive your first injection from me. Observe first how it works on Doris, and then you shall learn the same wild abandon!"

As he picked up a small sterile syringe from a cabinet on the wall I could hear Helen's trembling, pleading voice whispering my name over and over, "Jim, where are you? Oh, Jim!" At the thought of my utter helplessness, though so close to her, a wave of dizziness swept over me and I was unable to observe the horror in the other room.

Doris' scream seemed to clear my blurred vision. She was struggling in the grasp of Ryder, and for the moment he was caressing her in the vilest manner, his hands running over her body, his lips slavering on her face, the syringe in his hand forgotten. But he soon tired of this, and he grasped her arm, jabbed the hypodermic into it and sent the poison into her system.

Doris' scream ripped through the room as she felt the pain, and at the same time he loosened the cords that bound her arms and she slumped to the floor, sobbing.

But after a minute her sobs stopped and she crouched, naked, at his feet. Then, as curses growled in my throat, her arms slowly went about his legs as he stood leering triumphantly above her. She began to pull herself upward, her nostrils wide with passion and her lips parted in lustful anticipation as she slowly rose to her feet. Finally she stood upright and her naked body curled against his in a shameless way as her lips murmured in his ear. Suddenly anger came over him again and he flung Doris aside with a curse. She fell in a pitiful nude heap on the slimy floor, convulsions and tremors shaking her slim body.

In the same instant he turned his drug-maddened eyes toward the beautiful form of Helen and I knew that her turn had come. At the thought of such a horror coming to her something snapped in my brain. I knew only that I couldn't witness a similar degradation to the one I loved and I determined in that second to

cast myself out of the window and onto the rocky floor. I prayed fervently for the inevitable death that would come from a fall from such a height as I squirmed my body through the small aperture.

AT length I had dragged my body entirely through the window and was precariously perched on the edge of the sill, steeling my nerves for that dizzying drop to death. But in that second of hesitation something at my left caught the corner of my eye—a second window adjacent to mine! *If I could only reach it and swing myself into another room!* I glanced into the room below and saw that I was unobserved by any but my friends, Tom's tear-stained face looking hopefully in my direction.

By squirming cautiously I was able to balance myself on one knee and one arm-hold while reaching out with my other foot and arm for the sill of the next window. Then, with my back to the wall between the two windows and a leg and an arm firmly established on both sills, I gave a quick heave and swung myself in a semi-circle through the intervening space, crashing through the window and onto the floor of the second room.

In a bound I was to the door—it was unlocked! I was free! Like a flash I was into the hallway and racing to find the stairway leading to the chamber of horrors below. I had to get there before the other ape-creatures returned. *I had to rescue Helen!* But in that moment of fierce determination I slammed to a sudden stop and crouched against the wall. *Approaching from the opposite direction was the sound of ponderous, slapping footsteps! A giant beast-man blocked my way!*

Just ahead of me I spied a large steel drum of kerosene used for refilling the lamps which lighted the place, and before the creature saw me I had crouched behind it. Tense, I waited until he should

pass, almost close enough to touch me.

As his shambling, growling figure went by my hiding place my body arrowed forward in a low, vicious tackle, whipped his shaggy legs from under him and crashed his head and body against the floor with a sickening hollow sound. But even after that killing fall his arms flailed at me in a groggy, animal way. Sitting on top of his chest, my hands about his neck, I smashed his head against the stone floor time and again until his struggles stopped and he lay still.

Then, as I was about to leave him, my eyes opened in sudden wonder. During the fight the creature's head had become strangely twisted. I reached down and gripped the hairy, gargoyle head on each side and gave a savage pull—the entire head came off, and beneath was the head of a man! The revolting, hairy head was nothing but a shell which was worn over the human head! Quickly my hands fumbled for the fasteners which secured the rest of his hairy pelt to his body, and soon I had him completely stripped of his shaggy hide-covering. As I put the suit on myself, I noticed that the hair of the pelt had been sprayed with some chemical of a revolting odor, but the most amazing discovery of all was the skull-like head-piece—it fitted over the skull exactly, the wearer's eyes looking out through magnifying lenses which made their appearance horrible to any observer, while the nose-valve through which the wearer breathed was fitted with some mechanism that made every breath a weird, bubbling snarl of terrifying noise.

As soon as the suit was adjusted, I started again down the hall, my own gait shambling and awkward because of the weight of the heavy hide. In a moment I came upon a winding stone staircase, chipped from natural rock, and I bounded down it careless of noise, my breath coming in trumpet-like bellows. I hurtled into the large cavernous room where Helen

was, and her scream at my appearance told me how awful I must have looked. The slaver whirled to face me as I charged across the room for him, then caused my heart to sink within me as his hand flashed to his pocket and came up with an ugly automatic. But in my fury and desperation I never halted, even when the roar of the gun thundered through the room, and in that instant a mad feeling of triumph came over me. I stood before him and chattered with an unholy laughing sound. *The bullet from the gun hadn't pierced my hide! The thing was bullet-proof!* And I knew then why our guns on shipboard had been of no use against the charge of the "madmen."

Panic came over to his face as he realized he was caught in his own trap, but before he could move a step I smashed a savage blow into his face that dropped him unconscious six feet away, a crumpled heap on the stone floor. But I knew that the sound of the gun would bring the other horde upon us, so I hastily ripped my headpiece off to reveal my identity to my friends, then jumped to release Helen, Tom and the captain. Tom picked up the unconscious form of his wife and the five of us raced for the winding stairway to the hall above, but even as we made the stairs and panted up we heard the pounding footsteps and the chattering snarls of the beast-men as they swarmed into the chamber in furious pursuit.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pandemonium in Hell

EVEN before we had reached the top of the stairway I knew that the race would be lost. I could make but slow progress in the heavy, unaccustomed hide I was wearing, while Helen was weak from her experiences and Tom was burdened with the weight of Doris. My breath was coming in panting gulps, while the strained white face of Tom

showed the low ebb of his energy, and at every stride the sound of the oncoming horde grew louder and louder. We could only race until they came upon us and then go down fighting to the death for the girls.

But in that moment of absolute despair a sudden hope burst in my mind giving me a new wild courage.

"Helen! Tom!" I screamed. "Hold it! Stop!"

They came to a wondering halt, their faces blank with amazement. We had just passed the kerosene drum in the hall that I had hidden behind before my fight with the beast-man. I was back to it in a few strides, cursing the loss of every precious second, and I crashed it on its side with a back-wrenching heave. It spewed forth a gurgling river of kerosene that flooded the corridor behind us and swashed around the turn we had just passed.

Then, urging the others ahead, I raced another twenty yards to one of the kerosene lamps hanging in the corridor, wrenching it from its socket. At that moment the oncoming pursuers were splashing into the river I had sent upon them. I held the lamp as a bomb for a few seconds until they should be well into the trap, then heaved it directly at the feet of the foremost shaggy forms. Even as the lamp left my hand I saw the form of Hilda among the rout, but there was no other choice for me.

The lamp burst as a bomb might, and immediately afterward a roaring blaze of flame filled the passageway with an explosive detonation. It was a very holocaust of destruction, and the screams of the trapped pursuers ripped the ear drums. Their hairy suits burned like tinder so that they were cremated alive on the spot.

But we didn't remain in the terrific heat which burst down the tunnel; we knew that some may have escaped, and

that there was a second exit from the dungeon kingdom.

How we got to the chimney, up the steel ladder and out into God's air again, I do not remember. But I do remember the clean smell of the breeze and the soft glow of sunrise as we raced down the winding trail to the shore. We spied the yacht when we were half way from the hill, and when we came upon the shore we found a small dory from the yacht waiting for us. It was only a matter of seconds to row to the ship.

Once aboard I shouted to Tom to search for rifles, hoping that they would be effective against the revolver-proof suits that the mob wore, while I sent an SOS for help. The little sending apparatus was forward in the wheelhouse and I frantically sparked the forlorn appeal—dot-dot-dot, dash-dash-dash, dot-dot-dot—and spelled out the only information the captain could give me: "Yacht *Mere-maedchen*, out of Miami, off Madman's Island on Florida coast, hurry."

As I finished, Tom stumbled into the wheelhouse, his face ashen.

"Jim," he gasped, "someone's been aboard and broken open the gun locker. There isn't so much as a single revolver left! Everything's been dumped into the sea."

Tom and I gazed at each other silently, not needing to speak our thoughts—the ship defenceless, motors disabled, a murderous crew with weapons descending upon us. And during that silent moment a bullet crashed into the wheelhouse and splintered through the wall. The mad rout was rowing out to the ship!

TOM and I ducked and crawled back into the interior cabin to join the captain and the girls. It was needless to tell them what was happening for as we came in another shot ripped through the superstructure. It seemed a needless tragedy to lose everything now, after what we

had been through. At the thought of the girls again being lost to us, this time for good, I felt my nails draw blood from the palms of my hands. Then, suddenly, a wild, almost hopeless scheme occurred to me. It was worth a try.

I crept into the wheelhouse and then suddenly threw myself through the companionway and flat on the deck outside. A rifle bullet screamed against the steel side of the vessel and ricocheted away with a whining cry. The height of the scupper wall was enough to protect my body, prostrate on the deck.

I wriggled forward to the prow of the vessel and found what I had hoped would be there—a harpoon gun used in deep sea fishing! It was a wicked looking thing, built like a small cannon, that could throw a harpoon faster than the eye could follow and with the force of a high-powered rifle.

Peering over the side I saw the drug-crazed Ryder and one of his fur-clad henchmen rowing out to the ship, and they were not more than thirty feet away when I swung the gun on them. At that moment Ken, who sat in the back of the dory while his fur-clad ally rowed, came forward on his knees to take another shot with the rifle. As he did so, I let the gun go and the steel shaft streaked at them like a bolt of lightning, ripped through the pistol-proof hide like a meat skewer through a sardine, and tore on through Ken's chest and back, dragging the heavy harpoon line after it so that both of them were pierced as by a gigantic needle and thread.

The head of the beast-men was the first to find his voice and the scream that blasted the morning silence will remain in my ears forever. He slowly stood erect, his screech of agony wrenching higher and higher as he did so, while his arms flailed the air in a helpless dance of agony. Then he flung himself over the side of the boat, dragging the apparently paralyzed

henchman after him. Neither returned to the surface. The water was calm and clear.

Shortly afterward a dirty tramp steamer appeared and anchored off the island; evidently she was the ship to transport the slavers' girls to South America. But she had been at anchor no more than a minute or so when a sturdy Coast Guard cutter bolted over the horizon in answer to our SOS.

And that was the end of the horror for us, except what we relive in memory. We found that most of the foul creatures who had chased us in the dungeons had been burned to death by our trap, and those few who weren't had been taken prisoner by the Government men. As for the members of our crew, one had been killed during the attack on our ship, the second I had found dead at the wheel, murdered by the beast-men, while the third was found a prisoner in the caverns and set

free, thanking God for his timely rescue.

The girls from the house of horror on the island were taken to Government hospitals for treatment, while Doris recovered as soon as her period of coma was at an end.

As we were towed into port by the Coast Guard—and how good Miami looked to us then!—Helen came up to me and took my hand.

"Jim, dear," she said softly, "when we started on this vacation we said it would be a second honeymoon. But, my dear, I . . . I much preferred the first one."

I took her in my arms then; I didn't care about the others who were present and smiling at us.

"We'll return to the first one, darling," I told her. "And we'll continue that one for the rest of our lives. That's a promise!"

And up to the present my promise has been kept with ease.

THE END