

# Strange STORIES

---

VOL. II, NO. 2 **CONTENTS** OCTOBER, 1939

---

<b>DEATH IS FORBIDDEN</b>	<b>Don Alviso</b>	
<i>Did this Man-Muddle, Created by the Scalpel of a Wizard Surgeon, Have a Soul? [An Eerie Complete Novelet]</i> . . . . .		16
<b>THE CULT OF THE DEAD</b>	<b>Gabriel Wilson</b>	
<i>Dark and Terrible are the Mysteries of Black Haiti!</i> . . . . .		33
<b>KAAPI</b>	<b>Marian Stearns Curry</b>	
<i>A Jungle Spell is Cast when a Dark-haired Maiden Dies</i> . . . . .		41
<b>LET ME OUT!</b>	<b>Maria Moravsky</b>	
<i>An Imprisoned Mind Struggles Grimly for Release</i> . . . . .		51
<b>THE MASTER</b>	<b>Shelton Goodall</b>	
<i>There is a Terrible, Uncanny Secret About Malvolio, the Animal Hypnotist, a Secret That Makes Men's Blood Go Cold! [A Complete Novelet]</i> . . .		54
<b>HE WAITS BENEATH THE SEA</b>	<b>Tarleton Fiske</b>	
<i>David Ames Fights a Menace that Would Rule the World</i> . . . . .		65
<b>A MESSAGE FOR HIS MAJESTY</b>	<b>August W. Derleth</b>	
<i>A Mysterious Visitant Opens the Dread Door of the Unknown</i> . . . . .		75
<b>HALF BULL</b>	<b>Manly Wade Wellman</b>	
<i>Still Today the Redman Flings a Stone Upon the Indian Cairn!</i> . . . . .		79
<b>THE GHOSTLY VENGEANCE</b>	<b>A. Hyatt Verrill</b>	
<i>A Sea Wraith Seeks to Even Scores with Life!</i> . . . . .		88
<b>THE GEIST OF THE JUNGLE</b>	<b>R. R. Winterbotham</b>	
<i>An Amateur Archeologist Makes a Startling Discovery in Yucatan</i> . . . .		96
<b>THE LIGHT MUST BURN</b>	<b>Capt. George J. Rawlins</b>	
<i>Eerie Drama is Enacted within the Devil's Reef Lighthouse</i> . . . . .		104
<b>HOUSE OF THE GRIFFIN</b>	<b>Will Garth</b>	
<i>Forces of Terror Strike from the Void</i> . . . . .		109
<b>SPAWN OF BLACKNESS</b>	<b>Carl Jacobi</b>	
<i>An Evil God Shuns the Light and Seeks Victims in Darkness</i> . . . . .		112
<b>THE BLACK ARTS (A Department)</b>	<b>Lucifer</b>	8

---

STRANGE STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second class matter November 3rd, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Copyright, 1939, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$3.00; single copies, \$1.15; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, West, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Love, Sky Fighters, The Lone Eagle, Everyday Astrology, G-Men, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Detective, Popular Love, Popular Western, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Startling Stories, Texas Rangers, Range Rider, Detective Novels Magazine, and Black Book Detective Magazine.

# Spawn of Blackness

*An Evil God Shuns the Light  
and Seeks Victims in  
Darkness!*

By **CARL JACOBI**

*Author of "House of the Ravens,"  
"Cosmic Teletype," etc.*

**I**T LACKED twenty minutes of midnight when I locked the door of my apartment and raced down the steps to the waiting cab. A heavy rain, driven by a howling wind, swirled across the pavement.

"Sixteen Monroe Street," I snapped to the driver. "Oak Square. And drive like hell!"

The cab jerked forward, roared north into Monte Curve and turned east toward Carter. I leaned back then and prayed for a clear way through the night traffic. But even with the best of luck I knew I was treading on counted time.

Only a scant few minutes before, I had been in bed asleep. Then had come that urgent telephone call with that familiar voice over the wire.

"Dr. Haxton? Dr. James Haxton? This is your old friend, Stephen Fay. Can you come immediately? Something terrible has happened, and I'm in need of medical help. Hurry, man!"

*It stood there a moment, eyes blinking  
in the sudden glare*



The voice had ended in a gasp and a moan, and the connection had been severed with a crash.

Fay—Stephen Fay. I had known the man for a matter of ten years. We had worked side by side, in fact, as struggling students with adjoining laboratories. A huge man with a frank, open face, an engaging smile and an uncontrollable desire to probe deeper into the mysteries of science.

Down Carter we sped, windshield gray with drooling rain, across St. Clair, and into Monroe. Stephen Fay's residence was a forlorn pile of red brick, three stories in height, with a narrow, uninviting doorway.

A girl answered my ring, and as I hesitated, staring at her, she grasped my arm and drew me quickly inside.

"Thank God, you've come, Doctor," she said. "My uncle—Mr. Fay—is in the library. He's bleeding badly."

Even in the excitement of the moment I found myself noting the exquisite beauty of the white-faced girl as we paced silently down the corridor. Then she thrust a connecting door open, and I found myself face to face with my old friend.

He lay stretched full length on a divan, face contorted in agony. His coat and shirt had been ripped to shreds, as if by the repeated slashes of a razor-edged knife, and the exposed flesh was striped and cross-striped with deep gashes and incisions. A bath towel, red with blood, had been pressed against his throat. Removing it, I saw that he was bleeding profusely from a wound a scant inch from the jugular.

**F**AY rose up as I slid out of my coat.

"Leave the room, Jane," he gasped. "Dr. Haxton will take care of me."

It was a hospital job, one that required four stitches and possibly a local anesthetic, but I knew Fay's wonderful strength and his hatred for any undue commotion. So without further word I set to work.

Half an hour later he was resting easily, weak from loss of blood, but still amazingly calm and composed.

"Haxton," he said as I tried to keep him from talking, "Haxton, I want

you to stay here tonight. Can you arrange it? I—I need someone to help me protect that girl. It—it may come again."

I started to give him a bromide, thought better of it, and closed my case with a snap.

"What may come again?" I asked. "In heaven's name, what's wrong here?"

Fay swallowed painfully. "I'll tell you," he said. "I'll tell you what's wrong. It's a rat!"

I saw that he was in deadly earnest and that he was awaiting my reaction with almost feverish anxiety. His hands opened and closed convulsively, and his eyes regarded me with set pupils.

Then the stethoscope fell from my hands.

"A *what?*" I stammered.

He rose from the divan and lurched across to the great flat-topped desk that stood in the center of the room. He seized something like a paper weight from its surface and handed it to me.

"Look at it. I don't think you've even seen anything quite like it before."

The thing was made of wood, mounted on a flat base, and from top to bottom measured no more than six inches. A small carving it was, with agate eyes, protruding teeth, and a long, curved tail, crudely fashioned to resemble a life-size rat.

Placed on the desk where it belonged, it would hardly have attracted a second glance, but leering up at me as it was now from my cupped hands, it was a thing of inanimate horror. There was something repulsive in that squat gray form, something utterly loathsome in the way it crouched there on its black mounting, poised as though ready to leap at my throat.

I shuddered slightly. "Not very pretty."

Fay sat down in a chair and closed his eyes.

"I found that in an Arab shop," he began, "in the native quarter of Macassar, in the Celebes. Bought it for a few pennies simply because it caught my eye. I didn't find out what it was until I came back to the States

and showed it to my friend, Henderson, of the Chicago School of Anthropology. That carving is not a fetish or an ornament, but an image, a native object of worship."

I said nothing. There was a story coming, but I had associated with Fay long enough to know that he would start at the beginning, reserving any climax there might be for the last.

**N**ORTH of New Guinea, almost on the equator, in longitude one hundred and forty-two degrees," he continued, "there is an island known as Wuvulu, a tiny pinpoint of land near the Moluccas. Henderson tells me the aborigines of this island have one of the lowest forms of religion in the Indies. They worship the rat! This image is one of the few that has found its way into the outside world.

"When Jane, my niece, came to live with me, she refused to let the ugly thing repose on my desk openly and insisted that I cover it. I dropped an old piece of black cloth over it, and it has remained there in that manner until tonight—until five minutes before I telephoned you. Then"—Fay braced himself and leaned far forward—"then it came alive!"

The man sat there, scrutinizing me intently, watching my every facial move. He must have seen the incredulity in my eyes, for he rose slowly like a figure on clockwork.

"You don't believe, Haxton? You think I'm joking? Come, and I'll show you the proof!"

He moved to the door, still weak from loss of blood, and I followed a few steps behind. At the threshold two people entered the room to meet us—the girl who had admitted me to this house, and a tall, thin man clad in a rubberized raincoat.

Fay waved his hand in introduction.

"My niece, Jane Barron, Haxton. I've already explained to her that my accident was caused by the breaking of a glass acid vat in the laboratory."

He nodded significantly, and I understood at once that he desired to keep the truth from the girl for the present.

"And this," he went on, "is Corelli,

my laboratory assistant and helper."

The Italian bowed low. Apparently he had been out and had returned to the house only a few moments before the accident, whatever it was, had occurred.

"Are you all right, Uncle?" the girl cried. "You look so weak and pale." Then to me: "You must tell him to be more careful with his experiments, Doctor."

Fay patted her gently. "I'll be all right, child. But it's so late I've asked Dr. Haxton to stay the rest of the night. Will you arrange the guest room?"

Corelli looked at his employer with concern. "I trust the wounds are not too painful, Signor," he said. "If you wish, I will—"

Fay nodded absently. "Go to bed, Corelli. Dr. Haxton and I are going to stay up awhile. I'm going to show him my color-music machine."

The Italian bowed once more and left the room. Jane disappeared up a staircase that led to the floor above, and a moment later I found myself pacing down an ill-lighted corridor by the side of the wounded man.

We came at length to a large high-ceilinged room, lined with racks of apparatus.

"My laboratory," Fay said.

My attention was attracted to a ponderous machine in the center, which at the moment seemed only a confusing mass of wheels, tubes, reflectors and dials.

Fay led the way past this instrument, and stopped abruptly, pointing to a spot near the floor. There was a large ragged hole there, reaching from the bottom of the baseboard to a point some distance up the wall. From the hole, leading across the parquet floor, were a series of sharp scratches, marks that had penetrated the varnish.

**T**O THE left a small zinc-covered table was overturned on its side, with a mass of apparatus thrown in wild confusion. Still wet and dripping over the latter was a large clot of blood and a tuft of what I saw on closer inspection to be short gray fur.

I rose to my feet slowly. Fay

moved across the room to one of several chairs.

"I told you that rat image came to life tonight. You thought I was crazy when I said it. Believe me, Haxton, I never was more sane in my life.

"I've been working hard the last month or so, perfecting an experiment with what is known as color-music. Tonight Jane insisted I take the evening off and go with her to a movie. Accordingly I told Corelli, my assistant, to get everything ready for a final test in the morning before he left for the evening. We returned early. Jane went to her room, and I went immediately to the laboratory.

"All the way I was conscious of some kind of danger ahead. Then I pushed open the laboratory door and stepped inside. It happened before I could move. By the light of the night lamp in the corridor I had a glimpse of a gray shape and a head with red eyes and white gleaming teeth. The thing was utterly huge, large as a dog, and it threw itself straight at my throat, clawing like mad.

"I screamed, I believe. Then I managed to twist free, reach out and switch on the light.

"With the room lit, I saw it. It stood there a moment, eyes blinking in the sudden glare. Then as if the light were its only fear, it turned, raced across the floor, upset that table and made for that hole which it had gnawed in the wall. But before it reached it, I had sufficiently collected my wits to seize a heavy knife from the stand by the door, hurl it and catch the thing a full blow on the back. It let out a terrible shriek, then disappeared through the wall."

Fay paused, gripped the chair arm tightly.

"And unquestionably that rat was a gigantic incarnation of the image on my desk in the library!"

I sat there stupidly. "It all sounds impossible," I said. "Mad—insane in every detail. But why do you say that the rat was an incarnation of that wooden image?"

Fay leaned back. "Because," he said huskily, "the thing was no real rat, no natural creature of a living order. I know that. It was a hideous

caricature, a deformed monstrosity with the same exaggerated lines and detail of that wooden god. The head was rectangular rather than round. The eyes were far out of proportion, and the teeth—were long white fangs. God, it was horrible!"

For a long time after that, while a clock high up on the wall ticked off the passing seconds, we sat in silence. At length I voiced my thoughts.

"Whatever the thing is, supernatural or otherwise, it's real enough to cause flesh-and-blood wounds and to be wounded itself. We can't stand by and let it come and go as it wills. Where does that hole in the wall lead?"

FAY shook his head. "This is an old house," he said, "and there are unusually large spaces between the walls. I found that out when I tapped them for several of my experiments. That rat has the run of the entire structure. It must have been only chance that led it to choose the laboratory for a point to gnaw its way to freedom."

We used two heavy boards and a piece of sheet-iron to cover the opening. Along the baseboard on each of the four walls we ran an uncovered piece of copper wire, electrically charged with a high voltage from Fay's laboratory current. It meant that a second attempt on the part of the horror to enter the room would result in its instant electrocution. It meant that—if the thing were not invulnerable to such a mundane defense.

"No one knows about what happened tonight, save me?" I asked then.

Fay shook his head. "No one. I didn't choose to frighten my niece, and Corelli was out at the time."

"Corelli has been with you long?"

"About a year. He's an odd sort of person but harmless, I think. Never says much except when he talks about his color theory. Then he babbles incessantly. The man has a mad way of mixing spiritualism with science. Believes that white is the essence of all that is good and black is the lair of evil, or some such rot. He even

showed me a thesis on this which he had written. Aside from that however, he's really a capable laboratory assistant. . . ."

A strange bed to me, whatever the surroundings, is always the same. Tonight, with my mind milling over the story that had been related to me, I found sleep almost impossible. Hours passed before I dozed off.

But at three o'clock, by the radium clock on the dresser, I found myself sitting upright in bed. Something, some foreign noise had wakened me.

I got up, crossed to the door and looked out into the corridor. Blackness met my eyes. Then a sound reached me from the far end of the hall, and I stole stealthily forward. The sound came louder. It was *swish-swish* of liquid being brushed on a hard surface, the sound of a man painting.

I pressed my body close to the wall, muffling the noise of my breathing through the cloth of my pajama top. Footsteps then, receding footsteps. Carefully keeping my distance I moved on, and at the turn of the hall stopped abruptly.

The door of the bedchamber there—Jane's bedchamber—stood out in the blackness like a panel of silver fire. It had been painted with some kind of luminous paint. The brush marks were still wet and sticky.

I twisted the latch and peered into the room. The faint glow from the window revealed the girl sleeping peacefully in the bed.

Nodding with relief, I moved on again down the corridor. At the staircase I heard the library door on the floor below click shut. I descended slowly and waited at the foot of the stairs for an eternity, listening.

At length I pushed boldly into the library. Corelli was sitting at the desk, a trail of smoke rising from his cigarette, an open book before him. He looked up as if in surprise.

"COULDN'T sleep," I said shortly. "Thought I'd come down here and read a spell. You seem to have had the same idea."

He stared at me, then broke into a short laugh.

"I do more than read, Signor. I study. I am busy days, so I have only nights to work on my theory."

"Ah, yes," I replied. "Mr. Fay spoke to me about it. Something about color, isn't it, and the qualities of black and white?"

A gleam of interest sprang into his eyes.

"The Signor is interested in color, yes?"

"Some. Stephen Fay is my friend, and I have worked with him on many of his experiments."

The Italian nodded and pointed a finger toward his book.

"I am read LaFlarge," he said. "A brilliant mind, but a fool. They are all fools, these scientists. They see only the physical facts. They see only things which exist materially before their eyes. They claim there is nothing psychic."

I crossed to a chair and sat down.

"Tell me," I said, "what has the psychic to do with color?"

"Everything, Signor. Fay—all scientists—will tell you that color is a phenomenon that occurs when daylight passes through a quartz prism. The rays from the sun are decomposed and form what the eyes see as the spectrum band, red at one end, violet at the other. That is elementary, of course.

"A body, a piece of blue cloth, for example, illuminated by daylight, appears colored because it absorbs red and yellow and throws back blue. In other words color in an object is produced by absorption. Is that clear?"

"I know all that," I said.

"Black, which of course is the absence of all color, is seen as black because it is the absorption of all and the reflection of none. One might liken it to a lake of pitch in the midst of the jungle. It takes everything into itself and allows nothing to escape. It is iniquity, the essence of all evil.

"Has it never occurred to you that even the ancients recognized this fact? We have Satan as the prince of blackness; the worshipping ceremonial to him is the black mass; we have black art and black magic. Throughout the ages black has always been

synonymous for everything that is evil."

"I see," I said slowly.

"My theory then," Corelli went on, "lies in the exploration of black, not only physically but psychically. Let us say we have a room entirely painted black. Those walls are then the absorption of all wave lengths of light. Any photographer will tell you that an object—a book, a chair, a table—is seen only as a result of that object refracting wave lengths of light into the retina of the human eye.

"Is it not reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in this room of which I speak, any object or the refracted psychic equivalent of it will find itself likewise absorbed into the black walls?

"You begin to perceive, Signor? Where there is blackness, there is always fear. A child cries out when it enters a dark room. We reason with the child, tell it there is nothing there. Might we not be wrong? Might not the child's clean mind sense something which we in our more complex lives do not see nor understand?"

**C**ORELLI leaned back in his chair and lit another cigarette.

"Granting all that," I said slowly, "why would it necessarily follow that in black we would find only evil. Since black, as you say, is the absorption of everything, it must absorb the good as well, and the former has always been acknowledged to be the stronger of the two."

The Italian's eyes did not change.

"Think a moment, Signor," he said, "and you will see that only evil can live where there is utter blackness. Anything else would be smothered like a flower away from its precious sunlight. I—"

His voice clipped off, and I stiffened in my chair. From the floor above had come a girl's scream. Hollow and muffled by the intervening walls, the cry filtered through the house, filled with fear and stark terror.

With a single leap I was across the room and racing up the stairs. In the corridor above I switched on the lights as Stephen Fay emerged from

his room and, white-faced, began to run toward me.

I reached the freshly-painted door of Jane's room, ripped it open and burst inside. The girl was huddled on the bed, eyes wide with terror.

"Jane!" I cried. "Miss Barron, are you hurt?"

She gave a low moan and buried her head in her hands, sobbing.

"It was horrible!" she gasped. "A monster! A rat! A rat twenty times the ordinary size! It came out of that hole in the wall next to my dressing table and—and leaped onto the bed. Then it crouched, staring at me. Then—then—O-o-oh!"

The girl sobbed hysterically. . . .

It was a grim group that stood in the gray light of the library next morning. Jane Barron was still white and trembling, though I had administered a slight sedative a few minutes before. Corelli smoked nervously, throwing away cigarettes and lighting fresh ones before they were half consumed.

"I'm warning each of you," Fay said, "to move about the house with the greatest of caution. Something is loose in these walls, something we can't understand. Besides that, during the night the door of Jane's room was for some unexplainable reason coated with a paint containing calcium sulphide, making it appear luminous in the dark. Also someone entered my laboratory and tampered with my color-music machine.

"Haxton"—Fay nodded toward me—"I'm placing my niece's protection in your hands. Later perhaps it may be necessary to call the police."

After that I was alone in the library.

For some reason I had chosen not to reveal to Fay that it was the Italian who had smeared paint on the girl's room. Until further developments I meant to keep that fact to myself.

I picked up the thing then, which Fay claimed was at the bottom of the whole affair; the wooden carving of the rat. Again as I stared down upon its ugly body and curiously deformed head, an inner sense of horror welled over me.

Yet I told myself that was absurd. The image was only a manufactured god, representing a fanatic religion.

**B**UT an instant later I sat quite still as an insane idea began to clamor for recognition far back in a corner of my brain! An insane idea, yes, and yet one which fitted the conditions and which offered a method of combat! I leaped to my feet and headed for the laboratory.

Fay was there, as I had expected, and his composed manner quieted me for a moment.

"I can't understand it," he was saying. "The instrument was quite all right yesterday evening when I left for the movie. Corelli claims not to have touched it, and anyway he would have no reason at all for doing so. Yet the entire slide containing the color plates has been removed and this wooden frame inserted in its place."

I stared at the device. "It looks like a projection machine," I said.

Fay nodded. "It is. The instrument is constructed to throw upon a screen a rapidly changing circle of colors. It will be synchronized with an organ in such a way that when a piece of music is played, each note of sound will be accompanied by a corresponding color on the screen. There are seven notes, and there are seven primary colors. Thus in a rendition of a sonata we will both see and hear the composition. I—"

He broke off as the door burst open and Corelli lurched into the room.

"The rat, Signors!" he whispered. "It has come again! I saw it in the corridor."

But the corridor was empty. We traversed its length from one end to the other. Then we continued our search through the entire house. Deep into the many shadows of that ancient structure we probed. The rooms were silent and empty. Those on the third floor were closed off and barren of furniture. We found nothing.

At the foot of the stairs I suddenly whirled upon Fay.

"This new machine of yours," I said. "It uses artificial light to produce its colors?"

"Of course," he replied. "A carbon

arc at present. Later an incandescent of some kind."

"And with the color plates removed as they are, the only thing that would appear on the screen would be a circle of white light. Is that right?"

"Not exactly," Fay explained. "Artificial light differs from daylight in that there is a deficiency of blue. Strictly speaking, the instrument would throw a shaft of yellow light."

"But could it be made pure white light?" I persisted.

He thought a moment. "Yes," he said, "it could. I have a Sheringham improved daylight lamp. Its light is the nearest man-made parallel to the rays of the sun. What are you driving at?"

"Fay," I said, "if you value your life, if you value the life of your niece, listen to me! Insert that lamp in your machine and arrange the projector so that it can be moved in a complete arc. Do you understand? In a complete arc!"

**A**T HALF-PAST ten that night I stood once again before the frowning door of 16 Monroe Street. The intervening hours I had spent in a hurried trip to my own rooms and a brief but necessary visit to my patients in St. Mary's hospital.

Nothing had happened during my absence. Fay led me to the library, poured two glasses of brandy and then nervously packed his pipe.

"The machine is ready," he said. "What you've got in mind, I don't know, but the daylight lamp has been substituted for the carbon arc, and the projector is mounted on a swivel. What now?"

I set down my glass. "Let's have a look," I said.

In the laboratory a moment later Fay adjusted several controls and pointed the instrument toward a screen. Then, motioning me to extinguish the lights, he switched on the current.

A dazzling shaft of light leaped from the narrow tube and spread a glaring circle of effulgence on the screen. Fay moved the projector, and the light traveled slowly, stabbing

(Continued on page 120)



(Continued from page 118)

each article in the room in sharp relief.

"You have casters you could mount on the instrument, making it movable?" I asked.

Fay thought a moment. "Y-es," he slowly replied.

"Use them then and add an extension of at least twenty-five feet to the current wire."

He glared at me, but I swung about and left the room before he could voice protestations.

From eleven o'clock until eleven-thirty I prowled aimlessly about the house, glancing from time to time at the wall baseboards, nervously sucking a cold cigar. Finally in the library I picked up the desk phone and called Police Headquarters.

"McFee?" I said. "Dr. Haxton speaking. Yes, that's right—of St. Mary's. McFee, I'm at Mr. Stephen Fay's residence, Sixteen Monroe Street, just across from Oak Square. Can you send a man out here right away? No, no trouble yet, but I'm afraid there might be. . . . Yes, in a hurry. I'll explain later."

I forked the phone and waited. A quarter of an hour passed, and then, answering the ring at the street door, I found a lanky, hawk-faced policeman.

"Listen," I said before he could ask any questions, "I'm the physician in charge here. Your job is simply to look on, remember anything you see and prepare to sign a written report as a witness."

At ten minutes past twelve the five of us—Fay, Jane, Corelli, the patrolman and I entered the laboratory. We took positions according to my directions, the girl between Fay and me, the Italian in a chair slightly to the side.

Five feet in front of the door a connecting drop-cord was let down from the ceiling with a red-frosted electric light. Fay had wheeled the heavy color machine forward, facing the door.

"Ready, Fay?" I said, trying hard to keep my voice steady.

He nodded, and I stepped to the

door, closed it halfway and extinguished the lights. We were in deep gloom now with the dim glow of the red light gleaming like an evil eye before us. And silence broken only by the hollow rumble of a far-away street car.

Suddenly Corelli leaped to his feet. "Signors," he cried, "I refuse to sit here like a cat in the dark!"

"You'll stay where you are!" Fay snapped.

**A**ND so we waited. I could hear the ticking of my wrist-watch. The Italian's breathing grew louder and more hurried, and I could feel Jane's hands open and close convulsively around the chair arm.

A quarter of an hour snailed by. I wiped a bead of perspiration from my forehead. Ten minutes more. And then we heard it!

From the outer corridor came the padding of approaching feet. Toward the laboratory door they came. I placed a warning hand on Fay's arm.

The door opened wide. A scream of horror mounted unsounded to my lips. What I saw I will never forget. A shapeless gray body with a rectangular head crouched there, eyes gleaming hellishly.

For a split second the five of us remained motionless with horror. Then riving the silence came Jane's shriek followed by a deafening roar from the policeman's revolver. The rat braced itself and leaped into the room.

"The light!" I cried. "Fay, the white light, do you hear?"

There was a snap and a hum, and a shaft of glaring blue-white radiance shot from the mouth of the projector. But even as it formed a circle on the far wall, the horror singled out one of our number for its attack. Corelli!

The Italian went down with a scream as the rat threw itself upon him.

I heard the dull crunch and the snap of breaking bone.

Then that beam of light swept across the room under Fay's guiding hand and centered full on the thing. livid under the ghastly ray, its head twisted around, eyes twin globules of

hate. With a mewling cry of rage it made for the door.

"After it!" I shouted.

Together Fay and I rolled the projector into the outer corridor. It was blind, that corridor. It ended in a blank wall, and the doors on either side beyond the laboratory were closed.

Straight down the hall we pushed the color machine. The rat was uttering queer rasping sounds now, shambling wildly from side to side as it sought to escape the hated light.

Trapped, the thing stopped, whirled, then plunged straight at Fay. Even as the scientist's cry rose up I rushed forward to aid him. A raking claw gashed its way to the bone in my left shoulder. A nauseating animal stench choked my nostrils.

Then I seized the machine's projector tube and swung it. The white glare swept upon the rat squarely, centered on the head. An instant the horror poised motionless. Then slowly it began to disintegrate. The features ran together like heated clay. The eyes and mouth fell away. Before me a lump of gray fur diminished to a thin slime, to a darkish mist that rose slowly upward. Then that, too, wavered under my gaze and disappeared. . . .

I came back to consciousness on the divan in the library with Jane Barron chafing my wrists and Stephen Fay looking on nervously.

"It's all over, Haxton," he was saying. "Corelli's dead. The rat killed him. But—but I don't understand—"

I struggled to my feet, dazedly.

"Come to the laboratory, Fay," I said, "and I'll show you."

**WE MADE** our silent way to that room of apparatus where the Italian's body still lay motionless on the floor. Bending over it I searched the pockets and at length drew forth two objects. A small leather-covered notebook and a piece of black cloth, about the size of a napkin.

"Recognize it?" I asked, holding up the cloth.

*(Concluded on page 122)*

(Concluded from page 121)

Fay nodded. "Yes. It's the covering Jane gave me for the rat image on the library desk. But—"

I opened the notebook, glanced at it, then handed it to Fay. For a long time he remained silent as he scanned the pages.

When he looked up at length a strange light was in his eyes.

"You see," I said, "Corelli was in love with your niece. Didn't he at some time ask if he could marry her?"

"Yes," Fay replied. "But that was absurd, of course. I told him he was crazy and let it go at that."

"Exactly." I nodded. "And in doing so you injured his Latin pride. He became mad with secret rage, and he swore revenge against you. You know the man's color theory—that black being the absorption of everything is the lair of all evil. He saw that rag image on the library desk, and he recognized it as an artifact of devil-worship, the essence of everything satanic.

"Over the image you had draped a black cloth. According to Corelli's theory then, that cloth was the psychic equivalent of all that the image in its carved form represented. Do you understand?"

"He stole the cloth, mounted it on a wooden frame and inserted it in your color-music machine. Then he re-

versed the mechanism, and by casting a beam of black light upon the screen caused that horrible monster to be freed from its black cloth imprisonment and endowed with physical life.

"If we accept that reasoning, then Corelli's intention was to find a way of destroying you and at the same time prove the truth of his theory. That is why he smeared the luminous paint on Jane's bedroom door. White, being the antithesis of black, was a counter-defense, and he had no desire to see your niece harmed.

"For the same reason I asked you to insert the daylight lamp in the color machine. It was the only way of fighting the thing."

Fay had listened to me in silence. A queer, bewildered look crossed his face.

"But—but you can't expect me to believe all that," he objected. "It isn't scientific. It's made from beginning to end! The whole thing has no foundation in fact. Black—white— Good Lord, man, no scientist in the world would believe—"

"Perhaps not," I agreed. "Perhaps I'm wrong. If I am, we'll never know. Corelli is dead. But one thing I do know. I'm going to take this cloth and notebook and that image in the library, throw them into the fire and burn them."

And I did.