

EERIE STORIES

*Startling Adventures
in Chilling Horror*

AUGUST, 1937

VIRGINS OF THE STONE DEATH (Novel)	GATES ALEXANDER	10
<i>The glorious young body of the girl Terry Grant loved was fated to feel the cold embrace of death, instead of his own warm, protecting one—as her shapely limbs turned slowly into solid stone!</i>		
THE SOUL-SCORCHERS' LAIR (Cover Story)	RONALD FLAGG	36
<i>He had a mad desire to scorch his wife's soul, sending the intense heat of a blow-torch through her flesh.</i>		
CORPSE GIRL'S RETURN	ERIC LENOX	44
<i>She was alluring, desirable—but the newshawk shuddered. For he knew she had slept the sleep of death with the cadavers in the morgue.</i>		
DEVIL'S BREW	BRANTON BLACK	52
<i>Sardonically, Gavin Clark planned murder, and visioned his trembling young wife bestowing her caresses upon a corpse. . . .</i>		
HER ISLE OF HORROR	CLIFF HOWE	55
<i>Loretta's dark-eyed invitation made the young investigator face the horrific monsters of her storm-lashed island.</i>		
THE PAIN MASTER'S BRIDE	REXTON ARCHER	67
<i>It was stark horror that Edmund Neymores learned when he witnessed the ghastly torment of a helpless girl as she posed for a statue of agony.</i>		
SINISTER SKEIN	HORACE STONER	76
<i>Trooper Trant had to untangle a bloody murder skein—depending on the help of a beautiful girl who didn't trust him because he had seen her wearing the briefest of clothing.</i>		
REHEARSAL WITH DOOM	TERRENCE FLINT	86
<i>Middle-aged Graham Munster arranged a rehearsal with doom to force his pretty young ward to become his bride.</i>		
LUST FOR BLOOD	CLIFFORD GRAY	94
<i>The boat club's secretary floated over corpse currents to a madman's hideaway where the price of life was blood.</i>		
MATE OF THE BEAST	LEON DUPONT	102
<i>Len Oakley found that no mortal man could steal a bride of the beast.</i>		
TERROR'S TOMB	JOHN GREGORY	107
<i>Private Detective Manton wanted to know why lovely Anne Seymour went willingly into a pit of terror with a parchment-faced fiend.</i>		
STEP-DAUGHTER TO GREED	PETER REGINALD	119
<i>Terrified, the girl forced her trembling legs to carry her into the tomb of the dead—to search for an inheritance in hell. . . .</i>		

*Cover by Norman Saunders
From "The Soul-Scorchers' Lair."*

Published bi-monthly by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Application pending for second-class entry at Post Office at Springfield, Mass. Title registration applied for at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1937, by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates, address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

Twelve Issues, \$1.50; Single Copies, Fifteen Cents

Step-Daughter to Greed

By

Peter Reginald

*They caught sight
of that hideous,
deathly face.*



*There was fear and terror
written on the childlike
face of the beautiful girl.
But she forced her slim,
trembling legs to carry
her down into the tomb of
the dead—to search for
an inheritance in hell.*

THE girl sitting beside Detective Monty Wills leaned forward and spoke to the driver of the yellow taxi. Brakes shrilled as the cab came to a sudden halt. With nervous, black-gloved fingers she paid the fare.

Monty shuddered when he saw where they had stopped. The dark, sinister-looking wall of Greenmount Cemetery showed on the other side

of the street. Pines, moaning in the night wind, rose above it like ominous, brooding shadows of the dead.

He got out ahead of the girl and took her slim arm. But she freed herself as the taxi rolled away. Her face was pale and set and her eyes had that strange look of fear that he had noticed when he first saw her, back in the office of the Gilder Detective Agency.

Monty Wills sensed, from the moment she had met him, that the girl instinctively liked him. And he had fallen for her pretty hard himself. But business was business.

She turned and started across the street and he kept close at her side. Then suddenly she stopped and her small, lithe body stiffened. He saw that she was listening, bending her head sidewise. And at the same instant he, too, heard the noise that had attracted her. It was the throaty rumble of a powerful auto motor.

The next moment the girl stifled a terrified cry. A car with dimmed headlights had swung careeningly around the corner. It was long and low and was traveling at terrific speed.

Monty clutched the girl's arm and pulled her out of the way just in time; for the car, a black limousine, seemed bent on running them both down. Its whining balloon tires flashed across the asphalt where their feet had been a second before. Monty drew in his breath with a hiss.

It might have been the darkness of the night and the close proximity of the graveyard—but the car had given him a strange impression. Its low-slung black body seemed almost like a coffin on wheels—a coffin answering some inexorable call to return to the City of the Dead now that midnight had struck. Then the girl's tense fingers closed over his arm.

Wills felt her small figure sway close against him in the darkness, felt the softness of her thigh stiffen and tremble.

"Look!" she whispered hoarsely.

Monty stared wide-eyed. A face had appeared in the car's rear window. It was visible for an instant as the slanting rays of a distant arc light fell on it. It was a horrible face, pudgy and inhuman.

The two staring eyes seemed to Monty as fixed as the wide-open ones of a corpse. He couldn't tell whether it was the face of a man or a woman; but it fitted in with his ghastly impression of that coffinlike vehicle. It was as though he were staring through the window of a casket at the features of the dead.

A chill passed along his back. He looked after the car with morbid fascination. He saw the horrible face fading from sight amid the night shadows. He saw the car come to a stop by one of the cemetery gates down the avenue. An indistinct form moved from the car to the gate. Then came the eerie squeak of metal on metal, after which the black car rolled forward again and was lost from sight.

"They've gone in," breathed the girl. "We must hurry."

He hadn't any idea what she meant. Who had gone in? And what did she plan to do? Gilder had told him not to ask her questions. She had given references and had paid her fee in advance. He was to take orders from her and give her protection if she needed it.

She had given her name to the head of the private detective agency as Miss L. Stoner.

Monty glanced sidewise at her cameo-clear features, trying to fathom the mystery that lay behind them. In some way he knew that inhuman face they had seen staring at them from the car window was connected with her mission. In some way it lay behind the fear that made dark shadows in her eyes.

And he himself felt shaken by the sight of that car and at the gruesome place to which she had brought him.

With quick, furtive steps she crossed the street now and he fol-

lowed her, his wonder growing. Was she going to enter the graveyard?

In spite of the tense mystery of the situation, Monty Wills could not help but wonder at the braveness of such a very small girl as, in the dim light, he observed the tantalizing roundness of femininity in waist and thigh as she moved with quick, small paces.

She turned and walked parallel with the cemetery wall for two hundred feet, keeping close to it and almost hugging the rough stones as though some inner terror made her cling to anything that might give protection. Once she took his arm, and he felt a sudden warm thrill. But she dropped it immediately afterwards and resumed the barrier of mystery and aloofness that she had held to from the first. Then she paused and he saw her eyes move upward.

"We'll cross here," she said. "You'll have to help me. Hurry!"

He understood then that she planned to go over the wall.

It wasn't more than eight feet high. She was light, and as he lifted her he tingled a little at the shapeliness of her small, firm body. She drew herself up with his aid, and in a moment she had dropped out of sight. But he heard her calling huskily.

"Follow me!"

HE jumped, caught the top of the wall, and pulled himself up. Then he dropped down beside her. It was so dark among the evergreens that the night seemed to press in upon them as though it had a substance of its own. But when they had picked their way twenty feet ahead between rough-barked trunks, they emerged into ghostly moonlight.

To guide her over the uncertain footing, Wills grasped her small arm. She seemed to thankfully gather courage from his touch, for she quickly walked closer to him. Encouraged, the private detective shifted his arm to encircle her waist, fearing that she would resent the embrace. But she lifted her miniature, cameolike face

for a moment to give him a short, thankful look. Then her face tightened with resolution, and Wills knew that he'd have to wait until the business at hand was finished before he could know better this childlike woman-girl for whom he had an instinctive desire to love.

They picked their way forward, and all around them now gravestones rose from the earth, looking like white and gray wraiths, still and ghastly in the watery moonlight. A sense of foreboding that he could not repress filled Monty Wills.

They found a little gravel path winding between the graves, and the girl's slender, high-heeled shoes crunched along it.

Monty wanted to speak to her and ask her what ghoulish mission she had brought him on in this night-shrouded cemetery; but he had given his word to Gilder that he would not ask questions. She was a client and he was a detective whose professional services had been hired. And it was almost as though she had forgotten his presence. She seemed to have withdrawn into her own dark thoughts.

The path began to rise, and Monty saw that they were approaching the higher portion of the cemetery. Big family plots were marked off ahead of them, and here and there the somber white fronts of mausoleums rose, misty in the moonlight.

The girl walked faster. She looked so pale now, so impassive and marble-white that Monty shuddered over the thought that she, too, seemed a little corpselike. But when she moved ahead of him where the path narrowed and he saw the lithe, free-swinging grace of her hips, this impression faded. She was a living, breathing, desirable bit of femininity, and only the strange mystery that surrounded her made her seem aloof.

She suddenly touched his arm and spoke in a low voice.

"Wait here for me—but if you see any one coming let me know. I'll be at the head of the path."

She turned then and moved off. He had the illusion that she had suddenly vanished away into thin air, her black clothes blended with the darkness so perfectly and reflected no ray of moonlight.

He stood still, hands thrust in pockets, gazing up the narrow path. Once he saw a white gravestone blotted out as the girl passed in front of it.

Then, four minutes later, he heard a faint, ghostly noise—the sound of metal hinges opening complainingly. It came from the big mausoleum at the head of the path. The sound was repeated and was followed by a dim glow of light somewhere inside. The girl had entered that lonely, night-darkened crypt.

Monty Wills was tense, anxious, wondering how this little chit of a girl could have the courage to resolutely continue her mysterious objective, whatever it was. He visualized the brave set of her small chin, the determined swing of the almost child-like lines of her body, which her brief dress only partly shielded; and he felt that he should not leave her alone, although she had ordered it.

Minutes passed as Monty waited. A far-off clock boomed once, making a whispering echo that seemed to pass overhead like a fleeing wraith. The moaning of the wind in the pines along the wall came intermittently.

Then suddenly he was aware of another noise. It was the faint crunching of stealthy feet on gravel. He turned and a warning prickle passed along his scalp.

The noise stopped, but for a moment he saw something dark pass across the granite face of a monument at the foot of the hill.

He remembered the girl's parting instructions. Turning quickly he walked up the slope in the direction she had gone. He picked his way along the grass at the edge of the path until the mausoleum rose before him stark and white as the bleached bone of some giant. He went close to the door and looked in.

THE girl had one of the crypts open. There was a piece of metal in her hand, and he saw to his horror that she was at work on the end of a big coffin.

He called her name huskily, and she gave a start, then turned a white scared face toward him.

"What is it?" The words fell from bloodless lips.

He pushed the door wider and entered, filled with a sense of depression as the chill dampness of the chamber penetrated his clothes.

"Some one's coming up the hill. I heard steps on the path."

"Oh!" The girl's exclamation was a gasp of fear. She laid her metal tool on the top of the coffin and picked up the flashlight. Then she started toward the door. But she stopped suddenly close beside him and he could feel the trembling of her small body.

"Look!" Her voice was choked with terror.

He turned and almost cried out himself.

The flashlight in the girl's hand was still on. For an instant he caught sight of that pudgy, hideous death-mask of a face again, framed in the half-open doorway—the same face that had stared at them from the rear window of the coffinlike car. For a moment the eyes moved and he saw that it was human after all, and not the face of a corpse. But living, it seemed somehow a more terrible menace.

It disappeared from sight as he looked; but two other indistinct faces took its place, and he saw gleaming, threatening eyes.

He snatched the flashlight from the girl's hand and snapped it out. They were in total darkness now in the old mausoleum. But at least they could not be seen themselves, and the moonlight outside made the doorway an oblong patch of light.

The private dick gathered the small girl close to him, felt her shuddering against him. Her small hands were clutching at his clothing, pulling her-

self closer to him in her fear. In the darkness they stood, waiting for what was to come. And even though Wills sensed that their lives were in danger, he could not help but enjoy the delicious thrill of the girl's warm, trusting closeness.

Again something showed. It was a horrible, brutal-looking head this time. The head of a man plainly silhouetted against the outside glow.

Monty whipped from his pocket the automatic which he had a permit to carry.

"Who's there? What do you want?" he called.

But nothing answered him except the eerie echoes of his own voice in this chamber of death. The girl had drawn close to him now as though for protection.

"They've come," she whispered. "It's Myra and those others."

He did not understand what she meant. But the next moment the door of the mausoleum began opening wider as though spirit hands were upon it.

Monty jumped forward to stop it. Then it seemed that the night leaped in upon him bodily. He had an indistinct impression of flying, tackling forms and of a shrill, harpylike voice urging them on.

His finger instinctively pressed the trigger of the automatic and the shot echoed and reverberated in the confined space. But he sensed that he hadn't hit anything. There had not even been time to direct the muzzle of the gun.

It was knocked from his hand the next moment and he found himself striking out with bare fists. Somewhere back in his brain primitive anger flared like a crimson banner.

His attackers seemed as strong and brutal as gorillas. They came at him in the darkness, indistinct and awful like destructive monsters. But he lashed out with strong-knuckled fists and had the fighting thrill of feeling them strike against yielding flesh.

AND all the while in his ears sounded that rasping harridan voice. Who was it? What mystery lay behind this sudden attack and the girl's strange actions? His mind was as puzzled as his fists that struck out blindly in the darkness. But he kept on fighting furiously and felt his knuckles make contact again. There was a thud against the wall and the sound of a man swearing in pain.

Monty flashed on the light that he had taken from the girl.

A gorillalike man was now cowering against the wall of the mausoleum, one hand pressed to his convulsed belly. Another was writhing on the stone floor of the vault, felled by the blow Monty had given him. Close to the door was that bulbous, contorted face he had seen before.

It was, he saw now, the face of a middle-aged woman—a woman whose features had been made hideous by the etched lines of hate and greed. The mouth was pendulous and fish-like; the eyes bloodshot and cruel; the skin blotchy with dissipation.

Then Monty sensed rather than saw movement against the wall behind him. He turned just in time. A second more and it would have been too late. For the man whose midriff he had struck recovered sufficiently to thrust a hand beneath his dirty clothes. The hand came out with stubby fingers holding a long, gleaming blade, and an arm shot forward with a deft, purposeful motion.

Monty leaped aside as that glittering blade came through the air like a streak of livid lightning. He felt the death whistle of it as it passed close to his neck.

Then he heard a gurgling, fearful shriek behind him. He saw the knife-thrower's jaw drop.

The knife meant for him had found its mark in the breast of the hideous woman. She was swaying on her feet; her eyes bulging, her fishlike mouth working from side to side; and as he watched, she pitched forward on her

face and lay still with the knife driven up to its very hilt. She had been slain accidentally by one of her own brutal allies.

Monty took advantage of these few tense seconds to reclaim his automatic from the floor. He swung its muzzle toward the man who had thrown the knife.

"You see what you've done," he said harshly. "Make another move and I'll fire."

The man stayed still now, cowed by the threat in Monty Wills' voice and by the sight of that unwavering gun. Monty flung a question at the girl. He felt he had a right to now.

"What's it all about?" he said.

The girl was staring at the dead woman with fascinated eyes. Then words came to her pale lips.

"It's terrible, but she deserved it. She would have stood by and seen us both murdered if there had been no other way. She was like that always—full of greed and brutality. Those men and she came after the jewels."

"Jewels?"

"Yes—the one thing that father was able to save for me. I've a right to them. He wanted me to have them."

"Where are they?"

From the corner of his eye he saw her go over to the big casket and start work on it again. In a few moments she had the hollow handle off. Then she drew from it a small tissue-paper package. She came to him, opened it, and he saw a glittering heap of unset jewels. But still he did not understand.

Seeing this, she took a crumpled letter from her handbag and held it out.

He gave her the flashlight and, holding the gun in one hand, read the letter.

My Dearest Daughter:

Myra, as you know, has taken everything away from me—even things that I wanted you to have. And now, when I am helpless and dying she has had me adjudged insane. I can't even make a will.

But she doesn't know where the family jewels are. She doesn't know that I pulled

them out of their settings and hid them in the coffin I bought ahead of time. I let her think I was insane in the purchase of that.

They are in the handle, dear—the one marked with lines. After I am dead and put away in the family vault I want you to come and get them. But look out for Myra. She may grow suspicious and spy on you, and when her greed is aroused she is like a devil.

Your loyng father.

Monty pointed to the woman on the floor.

“Who is she?”

“My step-mother,” the girl said. “Do you understand now?”

“Yes,” he said huskily. He took the flashlight from her slim hand. “Go outside,” he said. “I’m going to lock all of them in the vault and send the police here. It’s the only way. But don’t worry, Miss Stoner. You’ve a legal right to the jewels now that your step-mother is dead.”

They backed out, and Monty swung the big door of the mausoleum shut and locked it. It had become a prison house for two human vultures and a woman who deserved to die.

The girl leaned against him for a moment, and Monty Wills did what was for him a strange thing. He slipped his arm around her slender waist there in the moonlight and kissed her once gently on the lips. He admired her pluck in putting this thing through in spite of her terror—and anyway he felt he had a kiss coming to him after the mad fight he’d staged. The sudden pressure of her fingers on his arm showed that she felt the same way.

Suddenly she pressed tightly against Mills, clasped her small arms around his waist and gave way to sobbing emotion.

“Oh, I’ve been through so much, and—and you won’t mind if I show that I care a—a lot for you? You—you won’t think wrong of me—because we’ve only just met?”

Monty Wills had two answers: kiss her soft, childlike lips long and tenderly; tell her that he was sure he wanted her with him always.

Wills chose the first answer.