

# 10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE



Volume Seventeen

July, 1938

Number Four

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT-FICTION!

All stories in magazines bearing this seal are written especially for this publisher and have never before been printed in any form!

## A FEATURE-LENGTH MYSTERY-TERROR NOVEL

**Maids for the Dust-Devils**.....Donald Dale 4  
*As the black wall of dust swept over the little terror-ridden town, I thought I saw lurking in its depths the monstrous, evil shadow that had already seized seven lovely girls, leaving no trace but a pitiful huddle of feminine garments lying on the streets—and lovely Kay was next in line!*

## FOUR PULSE-JOLTING NOVELETTES OF EERIE MENACE

**The Town the Dead Things Claimed**.....Paul Ernst 34  
*The jagged lightning flashes revealed a scene of nightmare horror, and young John Crayton's blood froze as helplessly he watched that weird white shape hover over Stella—summoning her soul to join the dead things that pillaged Boganville. . . .*

**Terror Has no Face**.....Raymond Whetstone 50  
*Deep in the jungle four men left a companion to die. But the dead returned—and four men covered in abject terror, for a faceless corpse had promised that they should die as it had—a hideous, faceless horror!*

**Goddess of the Half-World Brood**.....Henry Treat Sperry 74  
*Would Sicily, that gloriously alluring woman whom I held crushed in my arms, call forth that hovering pack of beast-like things to rend me limb from limb—if I repelled her weirdly sinister caress?*

**The Werewolf of Wall Street**.....Edith and Ejler Jacobson 90  
*Long after night had fallen I prowled those darkly empty city streets, seeking the lair of those fearful ghouls who even then were preparing the girl I loved for their gruesome midnight feast of blood. I had to save her—or die myself!*

## SHORT STORIES OF WEIRD MYSTERY

**Help Me to Die!**.....Leon Byrne 27  
*It was a soul that had no body; a voice that had no sound, that cried its eternal agony in the little room where so recently Death had come for the old man and the young lovers. . . .*

**Love Me—and Perish!**.....Lyle D. Gunn 66  
*How could I know that beautiful Mary Boyne's erotic Dance of Doom was the signal for my adored sweetheart to fling herself before a nameless monster who served as procurer for the Devil's Torture Mart? . . .*

AND

**The River Styx**.....A Department 105

Published every month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter October 6, 1933, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1938, by Popular Publications, Inc., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. \$1.20. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

# Terror Has No Face

*Four men cowered in utter terror, for their lives were forfeit by a corpse's vengeance oath. They must pay for their crimes, and die as their comrade had, without a face—a prey to the grisly creeping death!*



A novelette of an awful  
creeping death which leaves a corpse—without a face!



# By RAYMOND WHETSTONE

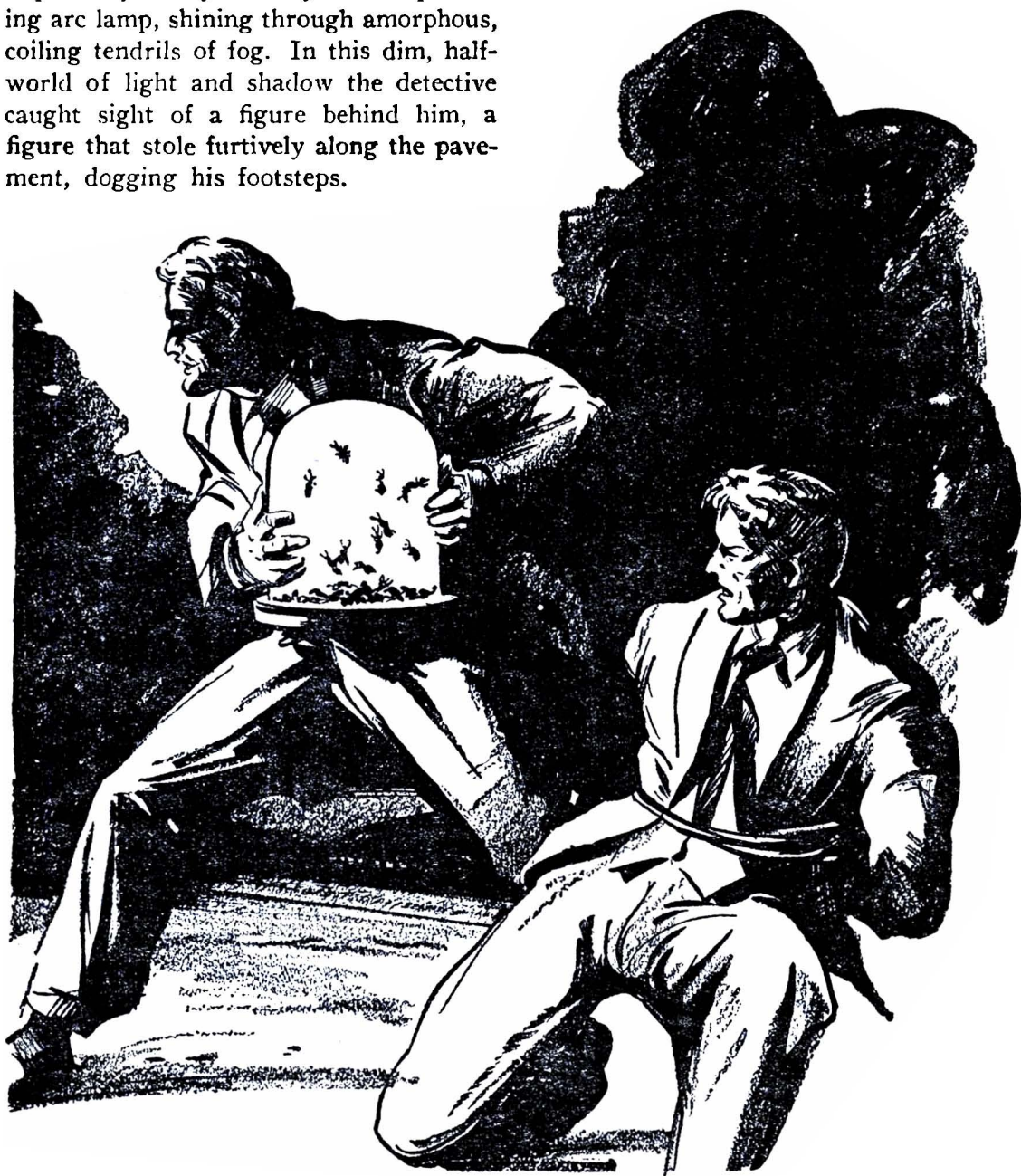
## CHAPTER ONE

### The Man Without a Face

**D**AVE WENDELL was within a block of his destination when a sixth sense warned him he was being followed. Without checking his stride, he glanced swiftly back over his shoulder. The street was dark, gloomy, imperfectly lit by the rays of a sputtering arc lamp, shining through amorphous, coiling tendrils of fog. In this dim, half-world of light and shadow the detective caught sight of a figure behind him, a figure that stole furtively along the pavement, dogging his footsteps.

Through the grey veil of the fog and night, the form of his pursuer was indistinct, shapeless, strangely terrifying. There was something about it that seemed abnormal and grotesque—something not quite human.

There was only one way to find out who it was that stalked him. He quickened his pace, reached the Benton residence where he had been called by tele-



phone that evening. The house was set far back from the street, surrounded by a tall hedge. Silently Wendell darted through the gateway, crouched behind the hedge. He fumbled in the pocket of his topcoat, drew out a small flashlight. His other hand closed around the butt of a revolver. With muscles tensed, every sense alert, he waited for what was to come.

Footsteps shuffled eerily over the pavement, drew nearer. Out of the gloom swam the figure. It hesitated, stopped directly in front of him. He jerked erect suddenly thumbed the button of his flash. A strangled cry broke from his lips as light sprayed over the nightmare creature before him.

It was tall, thin to the point of emaciation, its skeleton body outlined beneath the long, black cloak it wore. Bony fingers were lifted malevolently, shaping into talons. Underneath a felt hat, pulled low over the forehead, sunken eyes burned *in a skull without a face!*

That was the quintessence of the horror gibbering in Dave Wendell's brain. Where the features should have been there was nothing but scar tissue, with bits of dark skin still clinging to it. The nose was white cartilage, the cheeks eaten away. Teeth gleamed in the lipless mouth, fixed in a perpetual, frozen grin.

Even as Wendell stared petrified, the hideous creature snarled and struck at him viciously. The odor of kerosene smote his nostrils as he ducked the blow. He slipped on the dew-soaked grass, and went sprawling. He was on his feet again almost immediately, but that split second of time was long enough to give the thing a chance to escape. The sound of its footsteps thudded on, merged with the stillness. When Wendell reached the pavement, the monster had disappeared.

The detective cursed softly, the hair on his scalp still crawling at the memory of the horror he had seen. Who or what was

the faceless thing? Why had it been trailing him? Why had it smelled so strongly of kerosene? Unanswerable questions that must tie up in some way with George Benton's frantic telephone message. Benton should be able to clear things up for him.

Pocketing his revolver and flashlight, Wendell turned and followed the concrete walk to the house. He crossed the porch and rang the bell. The door swung open. Just inside stood a slight, middle-aged man with thin, tanned features. In the semi-darkness of the hall those features mirrored suspicion and a certain desperate fear.

"You are Detective Wendell?" the man asked tersely.

Wendell nodded, keen eyes studying the face before him.

"And you are not connected with the police department?"

Wendell gestured impatiently. "I'm a private operative, if that's what you mean," he said curtly.

The man sighed with relief. "I thought you were," he muttered. "But I had to make sure. A private detective can help me more than the police can. I—I'm George Benton. Come into the library and I'll explain why I called you here tonight."

The room they entered was wide and spacious, dimly lit by scattered lamps. Three walls were lined with books. The fourth was filled with glass cases, in which were mounted specimens of animal life, mainly native to tropical America. There were vampire bats, tiny monkeys, an armadillo, several kinds of insects, including the deadly tarantula. In the center of the room was a huge desk, and beside it stood a tall, young man whose sun-blackened skin contrasted oddly with his blond hair.

"My secretary, Paul Lambert," Benton said. "Paul is as much concerned with what I have to tell you as I am myself, Wendell," he continued hastily.

"Both our lives, as well as the lives of two others, are in terrible danger!"

"Danger?" The detective's eyebrows, lifted. "From what, may I ask?"

GEORGE BENTON didn't speak for a long time. When he did, his voice had sunk to a whisper. "We are being threatened—by a dead man!" he said hoarsely.

Wendell had schooled himself not to be surprised or startled by anything. But this was a little too much. For an instant he gazed angrily into Benton's haggard countenance. Then he turned and started for the door.

"Sorry, but I can't appreciate a practical joke," he said coldly.

"I'm not joking," Benton panted, clutching at his arm. "I'm telling you the truth, Wendell! The man who is going to kill us died six months ago! We're positive of that. And yet—we heard from him today! We got letters from him, threatening our lives. You've got to believe that. You've got to!"

The detective swung around, his forehead wrinkled in a puzzled frown. Benton sounded sincere. And certainly both he and his secretary were badly frightened. There might be something to the man's crazy talk, after all.

"Suppose you start at the beginning and tell me all about your trouble," Wendell suggested.

Benton swallowed convulsively. "As I said before, it began six months ago," he faltered. "We were in Brazil at the time, collecting specimens for the Museum of Natural History in Washington.

"Besides Lambert and myself, there were three others in the expedition. Professor John Brant, well known zoologist, was our leader. Then there were Dr. Melvin Shaw, on leave of absence from Columbia University, and Philip Drayton, a brilliant young pupil of Shaw's. We—we all liked young Drayton, thought

he'd be a great help to us on the trip. How could we guess that the time would come when we'd curse the day we took him along?"

"Then Drayton is the person you're so much afraid of?" Wendell put in.

Benton nodded. "Philip Drayton died while we were in the Matto Grosso, the wildest and most dangerous region in South America," he said huskily. "There's no question about it. And still, he's found a way to return from the dead and murder the rest of us!

"It was his own fault that he lost his life," Benton continued hysterically. "If he had turned back when we wanted him to, everything would have been all right. We had spent weeks along the Amazon, were well satisfied with the specimens we had secured. It was the beginning of the rainy season, and the very breath of the jungle was laden with fever. Our quinine and other supplies were running low. Under the circumstances it was sheer insanity to keep on.

"But Drayton insisted. He had learned there was a rare species of butterfly, the *cyrestis thyódamas*, to be found in the interior of Brazil near the Rio Madera. He was determined to add the insect to our collection. And so he persuaded us, much against our will, to accompany him.

"I don't know how long it took us to reach the Madera. I—I can't remember. But it seemed ages. The river, a tributary of the Amazon, is navigable for only a short distance because of its many falls and cataracts. We left our boat at a small village along the stream and struck into the heart of the Matto Grosso on foot. We didn't find the butterfly we sought. We found only trouble—with the Catuquinas, a tribe of Indians native to that region.

"Apparently they had little use for white men, for they were unfriendly and suspicious of us from the start. They did not openly attack us. It would have been

a relief if they had. They kept out of sight after the first glimpse we caught of them. But as we went through the jungle, their arrows began to fall around us, flickering through the trees, getting closer and closer, driving us to the point of madness.

"A hundred times we tried desperately to catch sight of our invisible enemies and fight back. But we never succeeded. They were too clever for us. And then, one day, an arrow struck Drayton in the hip, crippling him. It was too much for the rest of us. We broke and fled—"

"And left him to the mercy of the savages?" Wendell said slowly. The scorn in his voice cut like a whip.

Benton flushed. "It was the only thing we could do," he whined. "If we had stayed behind and tried to save him, we would all have been killed. What was the use of sacrificing our lives for his?"

"As we ran, Drayton shouted curses after us, swore he'd pay us back for deserting him. We heard his shouts turn to screams of agony—and we knew the Indians had him. . . ." Benton's voice wavered into silence.

"And then?" Wendell prompted.

"There—there isn't much more to tell. The Catuquinas didn't try to follow us. I suppose they were satisfied with just killing Drayton. At any rate, we reached the Madera and our boat without being further molested. But we didn't feel safe until we left the jungle behind us and got back to civilization once more. And now . . . we are in danger again! Six months after his death, Philip Drayton is trying to make good his threats and revenge himself on us!"

George Benton stopped talking abruptly and fumbled in the pocket of his coat. He drew out a folded sheet of paper, creased and frayed at the edges through much handling. Without a word, he unfolded it and gave it to the detective. On it was written in huge and sprawling let-

ters the following mysterious sentence:  
YOU SHALL DIE AS I DIED—  
WITHOUT A FACE!

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Death Is Kind to Cowards*

FOR a full minute Wendell studied the message. Then he glanced again at Benton's pale, frightened face.

"When did you get this?" he asked tersely.

"It came in the regular letter delivery about two o'clock this afternoon. The envelope was postmarked New York. Drayton must have mailed it from a letter box or a local postoffice some time during the morning—"

"A dead man mails you a letter, threatening your life?" Wendell exclaimed. Be reasonable, Benton! Why are you so certain Drayton sent it?"

"The note is in his handwriting," Benton insisted stubbornly. "I'd recognize it anywhere."

"It might be a forgery," the detective interrupted again. "Someone else could have sent that note, who knew Drayton's handwriting well enough to imitate it. Someone who might have been with you on that expedition, and is using the dead man's threat against you now for some reason of his own. . . ."

"But that's impossible," Benton protested. "The three men who were with me when Drayton was killed—Professor Brant, Doctor Shaw, and Paul Lambert here, are entirely above suspicion. None of them would do a thing like that even as—as a practical joke. Besides, they all received letters just like this one!" He turned to his secretary. "Show him the one you got, Paul," he gasped.

Lambert's note was identical in every respect with that of his employer's. It contained the same single sentence, the same sinister warning that Benton insist-

ed had been written by a dead man.

"*You shall die as I died—without a face!*" Wendell read once more, this time aloud. "What does it mean?"

George Benton shuddered. "I don't know," he whispered. "Possibly the Catuquinas did something horrible to Philip Drayton's face before they killed him. They must have tortured him in some fiendish way—before he died! And now," Benton's fingers were digging into the detective's arm. "Drayton has come back from the grave to do the same thing to us! You've got to stop him, Wendell! You've got to save us!"

His voice faded away. He was trembling all over, his blood-shot eyes were piteous. And Paul Lambert seemed equally affected by the intangible aura of menace that hung in the room. Sweat beaded his tanned forehead, and he clung to the desk as if for support.

Wendell's eyes raked their features, his thoughts going back to the ghastly shape that had followed him through the night to this very house. It had been inhuman, awful. What was even more significant, it was without a face! Could that strange shape be the very thing these two men were so afraid of—the corpse of Philip Drayton, animated by some unholy power stronger than death, creeping through the darkness to fulfill its vow of revenge? A corpse trying to commit murder! It was fantastic. A dead man seeking vengeance on the living! Reason and logic rebelled against such an impossibility. And yet. . . .

With an effort Wendell shook off the eerie mood that gripped him, handed back the notes. "What about the two other men who received these threatening letters—Brant and Shaw?" he asked abruptly. "Where are they now?"

"I—I invited them to come here tonight," Benton faltered. "I thought it would be a good idea to have all of us together for mutual protection when

Drayton struck. They should be along any minute now. . . ."

"Did you tell them you called me in on this case?" the detective wanted to know.

"No. But—"

Benton's words choked off in a strangled gasp. Suddenly a voice was screaming—the voice of a man driven insane with horror and fear. Muffled, terrible, it sounded inside the room, seemed to come from the wall itself!

"Mercy!" it shrieked. "Dear God, have mercy! I don't have it! I don't have it, I tell you! Brant's the one who does! He's the man you want! Kill me if you will! But not like this! Mercy—"

The voice rose to a frenzied screech, stopped abruptly. Benton was staggering across the floor, face chalk-white, pointing a shaking forefinger at an almost invisible door beside a bookcase.

"It's Doctor Shaw!" he babbled. "He's in that closet! Something horrible is happening to him!"

**W**ITH an oath, Wendell darted past the terror-crazed man, yanked the door open suddenly. A form bobbed there in the dimness, swaying a little with a ghastly simulation of life. It was the body of a dead man, dangling from a hook in the wall like the carcass of a sheep hanging in a butcher shop. And Dave Wendell felt black sickness churning and twisting in his stomach as he saw the hideous way death had struck.

The head and face of the man who hung there before him was entirely bare of flesh, as though picked clean by vultures! Only the skull remained, naked white bone, with not even a vestige of skin or hair clinging to it! Black holes leered at him from empty sockets where the eyes had been!

For one man at least the grim prophecy in those terrible letters had come true! Melvin Shaw, guilty with three others of

abandoning Philip Drayton to a horrible fate, *had died without a face!*

Fighting his nausea, Wendell drew nearer the gruesome corpse, forced himself to touch it. He turned away with a shudder, to explore every square inch of the closet space. He rapped on floor and walls with his knuckles, pressed onto panelling, but his search was fruitless. Aside from the dangling body, the closet was absolutely empty, its walls solid! There was no sign of the murderer, no evidence of any secret passageway through which he might have escaped! There wasn't even a clue to the grisly weapon he had used to mutilate his victim's face so horribly! Whoever—*whatever*—had killed Melvin Shaw had vanished utterly without a trace!

Wendell spun around unsteadily to glare at the pallid, stricken men behind him. "Well?" he grated. "What do you two know about this?"

Paul Lambert moistened his dry lips. "Drayton did it!" he choked. "He killed Shaw just as he threatened he would! He murdered him while we were standing here talking—"

"But if Drayton did it, how did he get away afterward?" Wendell interrupted harshly. "There's only one exit from that closet—through the door leading into this room! Drayton couldn't have made his escape that way! He couldn't have been in the closet at all—"

"But he *was* in there!" Benton panted. "We heard Shaw talking to him, didn't we? We heard the poor fellow begging for his life! And then Drayton—or the *thing* that was Drayton—murdered him and disappeared before we could open the closet door! I tell you, Wendell, we're up against something inhuman—something with unearthly powers! Something that can vanish through solid walls as though they didn't exist!"

"Nuts!" the detective muttered. "Ghost or no ghost, the killer's going to have a

hard time pulling a vanishing act when we get him behind iron bars!"

But his words lacked conviction. Once more he felt superstitious terror plucking at his nerves, threatening his self-control. Once more he was battling, fighting the worst of all fears—fear of the unknown! He had heard a man screaming behind a closed door. Barely five seconds later he had jerked open that door to find the same man a hideously mutilated corpse! Five seconds for some fiendish killer to strip the flesh from that man's face and disappear as if into thin air! It was all so utterly fantastic and impossible. It could not have happened!

"No, it couldn't have happened," Wendell mumbled to himself. "It must have been done in some other way." He wiped at the sweat forming on his forehead, turned to Benton again.

"Were you and Lambert at home all day?" he asked.

Benton looked puzzled, then shook his head. "We spent most of the afternoon in a museum," he said. "We were examining a collection of insects in the natural history department—"

"And I don't suppose you opened this closet after you came back?"

"No. We had no occasion to. We seldom use it—" Benton broke off suddenly, his face going livid. "What are you driving at, Wendell?" he gasped. "Do you mean that the murderer—that Drayton—brought Shaw to this house while Paul and I were away, forced him to go into that closet? Do you mean that both of them might have been in there since this afternoon?"

"It's quite possible that Shaw might have been, at least. . . ."

"But even so, that doesn't explain why the murderer delayed killing Shaw until just now! Or how he managed to escape from the closet afterward without being seen—"

"It doesn't explain another thing I'd



like to find out," Wendell snapped. "What did Shaw mean by screaming, 'I don't have it! Brant's the one who does!' just before he died? What was that thing he didn't have and the killer wanted? Have you any idea, Benton?"

"I don't know," Benton said hastily. "I—I couldn't even guess." But his voice didn't ring true, and he refused to meet the detective's eyes. Could the man be lying, keeping something back? "You'll have to ask Professor Brant," he added lamely.

"I'm going to," Wendell said grimly. "And right away. What's Brant's address?" He scribbled it down, turned to the trembling secretary. "Call the police, Lambert," he ordered. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"But you can't leave us alone," Benton whimpered. "You've got to stay here and protect us! Brant will be along in a few minutes anyway. He said he would—"

"Brant will never keep that engagement with you," Wendell interrupted harshly. "If he isn't dead now he might be soon! The police will take care of you and Lambert, Benton. I've got to warn John Brant before the killer gets him. Even now I may be too late!"

He heard Benton's despairing cry behind him, Lambert frenziedly telephoning police headquarters. Then he was outside the house, racing down the street to the corner. He hailed a cruising taxi, climbed in.

"Professor Brant's residence, 300 Olive Street," he panted. "And step on it."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Crawling Death!

**T**HE driver made good time. Scarcely ten minutes later they stopped with a squeal of brakes in front of a brownstone house. Wendell tossed the hackman a five-dollar bill, raced up the walk without wait-

ing for his change. The front door was slightly ajar. He pushed it open, entered a dark, shadowy hall. Light sifted out to him through drawn curtains hanging before a room to his left. Cautiously Dave Wendell crept toward the source of that light. He yanked the curtains apart, recoiled with a sick gasp of horror at what he saw.

Near the doorway lay the body of a man, legs bent, hands clenched even in death in a spasm of agony. The face was gone—obliterated! As in the case of Melvin Shaw, the flesh had been stripped away, leaving only a bone-white skull whose jaws yawned open as if in silent, hellish laughter! And bending over the hideous corpse, frantically searching its pockets, was the slim figure of a girl!

Wendell must have made some sound, for suddenly she jerked erect and whirled on him. For a moment she stood perfectly motionless and rigid. Then a strangled cry broke from her lips and she cowered back, eyes dilated with terror.

The detective reached for his revolver, leveled it at her menacingly. "Sorry to interrupt your little murder party," he said grimly. "But I think the police would like to have a talk with you. That," he gestured toward the thing on the floor, "was Professor John Brant, I take it?"

The girl nodded, her face a white, frozen mask. "But I didn't do it," she whispered. "I didn't kill him. I—I don't even know who did. I just got here a short time ago—"

"And proceeded to go through his pockets?" Wendell's lip curled. "Just a common, little thief, robbing a dead man?"

Angry color flamed in her cheeks. For the first time he noticed how pretty she was. "I'm not a thief!" she cried furiously. "I was only after something that didn't belong to him—something he took from my husband. Something that means everything in the world to Phil!"

"Phil?"

"Philip Drayton, I mean. I'm Mary Drayton, his wife."

Dave Wendell gaped at her foolishly, his mouth hanging open. Philip Drayton, according to George Benton's story, had died six months ago in South America! Philip Drayton, or so Benton said, had come back from the grave to exact a terrible vengeance on four men who had left him to a horrible fate! Two of those men had already been murdered, dying as Drayton was supposed to have died, without a face! And now here was this lovely girl, who said she was Drayton's wife, searching the pockets of one of Drayton's victims, looking for something she claimed meant everything in the world to her former husband! What in this world could be important to a dead man anymore? It didn't make sense!

"Let's get this straight," Wendell said feebly. "First of all, what is this 'something' you want so badly?"

The girl's lips set in a thin line. "It's none of your business," she said defiantly. "But if it isn't on Brant's body," her voice hardened, "one of the others must have it. I'll get it if it's the last thing I ever do!"

"So you're planning another murder or two?" Wendell rasped. "I don't think so! Not if I can help it, at any rate!"

"Murder?" she gasped. "But I didn't murder anyone! I just told you I—"

Her voice broke off suddenly and relief flooded over her face as she caught sight of someone over the detective's shoulder. "Philip!" she cried joyfully. "Thank God you're here!"

The rank odor of kerosene, more than what she said, warned Dave Wendell of the horror that lurked behind him. He whirled around, his blood turning to ice in his veins. One split-second glimpse he caught of the inhuman shape that had trailed him to George Benton's house earlier that evening—the ghastly, faceless creature that must be the corpse of Philip

Drayton! Then a club in the thing's hand swept up and descended with crushing force on his head. Crimson lights whirled and danced in front of his eyes. Pain exploded inside his skull, snuffing out consciousness as a strong wind snuffs out a candle. . . .

**I**T SEEMED hours later when Dave Wendell opened dull, suffering eyes once more. He was sprawled on the floor, his revolver lying a few inches away from his outstretched fingers. With the exception of the mutilated body of John Brant, he was alone in the room. Both the girl and the faceless thing had vanished!

Wendell staggered to his feet, picked up his revolver. Drums of agony boomed inside his head. He rubbed a shaking hand across his aching forehead, tried to think straight. The thing without a face was behind these murders. He was positive of that now. Whether it was human or inhuman, a living creature or a corpse, didn't matter. It was killing, destroying life!

The girl must be its accomplice! She had declared that she knew nothing about the murders, but she must have been lying. She and the thing had already killed two men—Melvin Shaw and John Brant! They would kill two more—George Benton and Paul Lambert—unless they were stopped!

He'd stop them! He'd save Benton and Lambert! With that determination seething in his brain, Wendell stumbled from the room and out into the night air. He could never recall afterward how or when he reached Benton's home. The next thing he remembered was running up the path to the house, dark and silent as a tomb. Even before he burst through the front door he knew death had preceded him! Even before he rushed into the library, he knew he would be too late!

The body of a man lay there in front of the desk. Like the bodies of the others

who had died that night, it was hideously mutilated, the face and head stripped clean of flesh! But by the clothing it wore, Wendell identified it as the corpse of Paul Lambert. Lambert who had died, too, without a face! Lambert who was the third to be hunted down and murdered to satisfy a dead man's lust for vengeance!

But where was Benton, the fourth victim marked for slaughter? There was no sign of him in the room! Had he escaped? And why weren't the police there? Lambert had telephoned them to come! He had been calling them when Wendell rushed away on that wild goose chase to Brant's home.

Or *had* Lambert called the police? With an inarticulate cry, Wendell leaped for the telephone, snatched it up. Dangling wires trailed across the desk as he lifted the instrument! The killer had made the phone useless so that Lambert couldn't get help that might have saved his life!

Wendell returned to the corpse, knelt beside it. Lambert had been dead only a few minutes; his flesh was still warm to the touch. The detective got to his feet, brow furrowed in thought. Significant happenings of that night of horror whirled in a stream of lurid pictures through his mind. He recalled the two ominous notes he had read that evening. He thought of another corpse he had seen. He remembered a man screaming in terrible fear—a man who was found dead and hideously mutilated seconds afterward. These fragments of a jigsaw of mystery should form a completed pattern of crime if only he could put them together.

Again Wendell was at the desk, running his fingers underneath its edge. He straightened up finally, waited. Suddenly a voice was shrieking in the room once more—a voice so muffled and terrible that it froze the blood with horror. "Mercy!" it shrieked. "Dear God, have mercy! I don't have it! I don't have it, I tell you! Brant's the one who does! He's the man

you want! Kill me if you want! But not like this! Mercy—"

It was Melvin Shaw's voice! Shaw had screamed those same words once before! But Shaw was dead—his corpse dangled from a hook in the closet! Dave Wendell was pale and shaking as he listened. But a moment later he smiled grimly as the hideous voice rose to a nerve-tearing screech, and rasped away into silence.

"As simple as all that!" he muttered aloud. "Just a recording of Shaw's voice—what a fool I was not to spot it! What a fool to let the real murderer escape when I had my hands on him! But he must be still in the house! And this time his tricks won't help him!"

Whirling, the detective went plunging out into the hall. The other rooms in the house were dark. They were vacant, too, Wendell switched on lights as he ran. He reached the kitchen, stopped in front of a door leading into the cellar. Dim light filtered up to him as he opened the door. Down below the killer must be lurking, preparing his next move in this desperate game of life and death.

Cautiously Wendell descended the staircase. His hand was thrust deep in his pocket, gripping the butt on his revolver. He reached the concrete floor of the cellar, and moved across it on tiptoe. There was no trace of the killer.

But on a table in the center of the floor was a transparent, circular object that reflected the light—a huge, glass jar. And inside that jar was a dark ball that moved and swayed with hideous life.

**W**ENDELL'S breath was frozen vapor in his lungs as he drew nearer and saw what that living ball was. It was made up of dark moving bodies, millions of tiny insects. They were vicious South American ants, the vilest scourge of the tropics! They devoured everything that was unfortunate enough to be in their way—leaves, plants, other insects, and living

creatures many times their size! All animals even man, fled in terror at their approach! They were more to be dreaded than the most savage beast that roamed the jungle!

This, then, was the hideous murder weapon the killer had devised! There was a wooden bottom to the jar, and, in it, a hole large enough to admit a man's head. Once fastened in there, the victim's face would be exposed to the ants. They would devour skin, flesh—everything, leaving nothing but grinning bone behind! This was why three men had died—without a face! No wonder Melvin Shaw had screamed in horror when he saw what was to be his fate!

Sick, nauseated, Dave Wendell stared at the swarming insect horrors. So fascinated was he that he failed to notice that a door was opening inch by inch at the other end of the cellar. He didn't hear a black, furtive shape creep from its hiding place and start silently toward him. He was aware of no danger until a vicious blow struck the side of his head with terrific force. Arrows of anguish shot through his brain. He felt hideous darkness envelop him. He felt his limbs turn to rubber, and the floor rushed up to meet him as he fell. . . .

Consciousness returned to Dave Wendell slowly, consciousness filled with agonizing pain. His head throbbed excruciatingly, and there was the flat taste of blood in his mouth. He groaned, opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor, bound hand and foot. Near him stood the shadowy figure, watching him through the slitted eye-holes in its masked face.

"You should be punished for interfering with my plans, David Wendell," the figure droned. "But I am inclined to be merciful. I am succeeding in what I set out to do in spite of you. I have already revenged myself on Melvin Shaw, John Brant, and Paul Lambert for the wrong they did me! There remains only—"

"Stop it!" Wendell cried hoarsely. "You're just wasting your breath by trying to feed me that nonsense! I know the whole cursed scheme! I know who you are and the reason for your hellish crimes!"

"Really?" A snarling note crept into the gloating voice. "In that case it may be necessary to include you in my list of victims, after all! But go on, Wendell. You interest me."

An icy wind seemed to blow through Dave Wendell as he caught the menace underlying the masked fiend's words. He knew too much. He was in the way. Unless a miracle happened, he would meet the same hideous end as the others. Already the insect horrors were scurrying around more rapidly in their glass cage as if scenting the flesh of another victim!

"Yes, I understand the whole devilish plot now," Wendell continued, sparring desperately for time. "I know what really happened to Philip Drayton on that expedition to South America. You wanted me to believe you had been forced to leave him behind when you fled from an Indian attack, didn't you? But that was a lie to cover up your own guilt! You and the others *did* leave Drayton behind—but to a fate infinitely more horrible than anything a tribe of savages might have done to him. You tied him up in the path of an army of ants, knowing what would happen when the insects reached him, planning to murder him by the same means you used to murder your three accomplices tonight! I have no proof of that, of course. But I am just as positive you did it as if I had been there to watch you.

"But why did you and the others wish to murder Drayton? There could be only one motive—greed for wealth. Drayton had something the rest of you wanted—something so valuable you were determined to kill him to get it. Something, I found out a short time ago, that was small enough to be concealed in a man's pocket.

What could be so tiny and still be of such value that you would commit murder to possess it? Only one thing—a jewel of some sort, a precious stone. . . .”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Mask of Horror

“YOU’RE much too clever, Wendell,” the masked figure snarled. “Too clever for your own good. You’re right, Drayton *was* left in the jungle for the ants to devour him. He did have a precious stone—a diamond known as the ‘Eye of Light’ and worth a small fortune. It was given to the poor fool by a rich Brazilian whose life he happened to save while we were in Rio de Janeiro. From the moment I saw that diamond I knew I had to have it for my own. The money I could get from selling it would leave me in comfortable circumstances for the rest of my days. And I did get it at last! I have it now—”

“I thought so,” Wendell interrupted harshly. “But it didn’t really come into your possession until tonight, did it? For after you and the others robbed Drayton of the diamond and disposed of him, the jewel disappeared. You found out then that there was no honor among thieves, let alone murderers! You knew one of your three accomplices had stolen it, but you weren’t sure just which one. And so you thought of a scheme that would not only frighten the thief into giving up the diamond, but would also eliminate him and your two other confederates so that the proceeds from the sale of the jewel would be yours alone!

“Ironically enough, you decided to use Philip Drayton in that scheme. When you and your three partners in crime left Drayton to die in the jungle, he had screamed threats after you, vowed he would find a way to get even. You knew your accomplices remembered those

threats. If you could convince them that Drayton actually had come back from the dead for his revenge, you could break down the nerve of whichever one had stolen the diamond to such an extent that he would be only too glad to give it up. Once the diamond was in your possession, you could murder all three of your confederates and pin the blame on a dead man!

“And you did it well. You started your terror build-up by imitating Drayton’s handwriting in the notes you sent to your victims, warning them they were going to die as he had died—without a face. You also mailed one to yourself, of course, to keep them from suspecting you. And since you lived in the same house with one of your intended victims, you got your note the same time he got his and could study his reaction. You pretended to be just as panic-stricken as he was, even agreed with him that I, a detective, should be called in as a protective measure. You knew the police were bound to find out what was going on anyhow, and hoped to convince them through me that a supernatural influence was actually at work.

“You did go to a museum this afternoon. But you didn’t stay there long, as you wanted me to believe. You slipped away after a short time and went to find Shaw, your first victim. You brought him here, compelled him to enter this cellar with you. Then”—Wendell shuddered as he glanced again at the hideous, swarming death in the glass jar—“you showed the poor wretch the murder weapon you had devised to carry out the threat in those letters. You had brought the colony of ants in that jar from South America for just such a purpose.

“Shaw went crazy with terror when he found out what was going to happen to him. He vowed he hadn’t stolen the diamond, accused Brant of taking it instead. You let him rave on for a little while before you killed him. You had rigged up



a dictaphone outfit in the cellar which was making a record of what he said. You figured even then that you might need such a device to pull the wool over my eyes a little later on.

"When the ants were finished with Shaw, you went after Brant next. Wrapping up the glass jar so that no one could tell what it contained, you drove with it to Brant's house. But before you murdered him, you found out he didn't have the diamond either. Only one person could have it—the third man who had helped you take it from the original owner in the jungle.

"You had gone with that man to the museum earlier in the afternoon. He was still there, not knowing that death had already struck down his two companions. You rushed back here then to set the stage for the performance tonight. You dragged Shaw's corpse up from the cellar and put it in the closet. Concealing the dictaphone record of the dead man's voice behind a bookcase near the closet, you connected it with an electric switch underneath the edge of the desk. You could stand beside the desk and start the record without anyone noticing what you were doing. You were all ready now for the little drama of horror you played this evening.

"And I swallowed the bait you had set for me, hook, line and sinker," Wendell went on bitterly. "When you clicked on the switch and I heard Shaw's voice apparently coming from the closet, I reacted just as you hoped I would. I thought, of course, that someone was in the closet with Shaw, murdering him. And when I yanked open the door and found the poor devil's body hanging in there, that belief was intensified. Your little trick helped you in two ways. In the first place, it gave you an ironclad alibi, since obviously you couldn't have just killed Shaw when you weren't even close to him. Secondly, it sent me racing out of the house in a

foolish attempt to save Brant who was already dead, leaving the third victim of your hellish scheme completely at your mercy!

"I didn't get wise to you until I came back here again from my wild-goose chase to Brant's house," Wendell continued harshly. "Then when I found the body of your last victim lying in front of the desk and the telephone wires cut, I began to smell a rat. Why should a supernatural killer need to take the precaution of cutting telephone wires so that its victim couldn't call for help? I remembered, too, that Shaw's body had felt cold when I touched it, instead of being warm as it should have been if he had just been murdered. I knew then that both he and Brant had been killed hours before and your alibi wasn't worth a nickle. I pried around a little bit more and discovered how you had apparently made Shaw talk long after his death. Those murders hadn't been committed by an inhuman thing, the corpse of a dead man avenging an old wrong! No, a human agency was at work: you, a fiendishly clever murderer, who would stop at nothing to accomplish your purpose! But I had found that out too late to do much good—"

"**A**ND you came back here too soon for your own good, Wendell!" the black shape interrupted viciously. "After you left for Brant's home, my last victim went to pieces completely and confessed he had stolen the diamond. He surrendered it to me and began to plead for his life. But my little pets soon stopped his yammering, the damned, sniveling thief! I was getting ready to destroy the incriminating evidence—the murder weapon I had used and the dictaphone record of Shaw's voice—when you interrupted me. You just gave me time to hide in the back part of the cellar when you came rushing down here. But though you've discovered who I am, I'll still get out of this mess

with a whole skin, Wendell! I'll still save my hide—by killing you! And I might as well use the same weapon on you I used on the others—”

“You can't get away with it!” Wendell cried hoarsely. “You needed me to prove your alibi! The police are sure to find you out now!”

“Don't be stupid, Wendell,” the robed figure chuckled. “I don't need an alibi! The police will never dream I committed the murders, and you know it!”

How true that was, Wendell realized bitterly. The fiend would escape and never be punished! If only he could stall the killer off a little while longer! The masked shape had lifted the terrible glass jar, was coming toward him with it. Inside it, the dark ball burst into a thousand scurrying horrors, ready to devour his lips, his tongue, his eyelids, strip the raw, red flesh from his skull! Sweating, panting, Wendell struggled with his bonds. They were giving slightly, but not enough for him to reach the revolver in his pocket. He needed just a little more time! Something *must* happen to stop the murderer for a few more seconds!

And something did! Suddenly the stairs leading down the cellar creaked ominously. A thing was descending those stairs—a thing of horror! It was gaunt, hideous, faceless—the corpse of a dead man! The corpse of Philip Drayton, returning at last for its revenge! Slowly, remorselessly it drew nearer the fiend who had murdered it!

The masked man must have heard that slow approach, for he whirled around to confront the horror stealing upon him. A jangling scream rasped from his lips and the glass jar with its awful contents dropped from his fingers and splintered into fragments on the floor. Whimpering, crazed with fear, he cowered back, shaking from head to foot, his red-rimmed eyes rolling wildly in their sockets.

“You have come back!” he bleated.

“You have made good your vow! No, it can't be! It can't be! Stay away from me! For the love of God, stay away from me!”

The thing that had been Philip Drayton didn't answer. It was as though death had robbed it of speech. In ghastly silence it continued on, fleshless jaws open in a snarl of hate, skeleton fingers shaping into claws to bury themselves in the masked figure's throat.

“No!” the fiend screamed again. “I killed you once! I'll try again, make sure this time! If the ants didn't finish you in the jungle, a bullet will now!”

The murderer was pawing wildly inside his coat, striving to jerk out a gun. But Wendell's hands were free at last, his own revolver in his fingers. Orange flame stabbed suddenly through the gloom of the cellar. The masked figure shrieked, weaved back and forth uncertainly, crumpled in a grotesque heap to the floor.

Swiftly Wendell untied the thongs around his ankles, bent for a moment over the form of the murderer. “Too bad my bullet only stunned him,” he muttered. “But perhaps it's just as well. The electric chair will be a better punishment.”

The detective straightened up, turned to the hideous creature behind him. He saw now that the thing's features weren't so badly mutilated as he had supposed. Enough of the face was left to indicate that its owner had once been handsome and manly and young. A girl had entered the cellar and was standing beside it now—the same girl Wendell had seen at John Brant's home a short time before.

The detective went toward them, gripped the thing's hand. “Thank God you came when you did, Drayton,” he said fervently. “You saved me from a horrible death. You”—he hesitated as he forced himself to look again at that ghastly remnant of a face—“you weren't killed in the jungle, after all?”

It was the girl who answered. “Philip can't talk very well yet,” she explained

huskily. "No, he wasn't killed as his enemies thought he had been. He was rescued by a tribe of friendly Indians before the ants finished him. But even now, he hasn't fully recovered from his terrible experience. Even now"—her voice broke—"he imagines the awful insects are still crawling on him and insists on dousing himself with kerosene. . ."

"I understand," Wendell said gently. "I've heard that people in tropical countries use kerosene to keep the horrible little beasts away. I"—he tried to grin—"I was wishing for some kerosene myself tonight."

Mary Drayton shuddered and drew closer to her husband as she glanced at the unconscious form of the murderer on the floor. "And to think George Benton planned all this," she whispered. "To think any man could be so cruel and fiendish—"

"Benton?" Wendell interrupted. "That isn't Benton." He stooped once more over the black-clad figure, ripped off the mask. The thin, tanned features beneath were distorted with fear and rage.

**"PAUL LAMBERT!"** the girl panted. "I—I can't believe it! I saw his body—"

"That was George Benton's body you saw upstairs in the library," Dave Wendell said grimly. "Planting Benton's corpse there to be mistaken for his own was another of Lambert's tricks to keep everyone from finding out he was the murderer. He killed Benton, destroyed his face to prevent recognition. He then changed clothes with the dead man, knowing that Benton's body would pass for his, since they were both approximately the same height and weight. Lambert, you see, wasn't sure he could convince the police that a supernatural killer had committed the murders. But he figured he could still make a clean getaway by having it appear that he himself was a victim of the killer.

With Paul Lambert apparently dead, he could take the diamond he had schemed so hard to get, adopt an assumed name, and go to another country where he would never be suspected.

"I fell for his gag myself at first," Wendell continued harshly. "Then I remembered the two threatening letters Benton had showed me earlier in the evening. The one Benton had received was worn and frayed, indicating it had worked on his nerves so much that he had looked at it countless times during the day. The other note—Lambert's—had hardly been handled at all. In other words, Lambert hadn't been terrified by the ominous warning in those letters because he was the author of them himself. I recalled, too, how Lambert had hung around the desk all the time, waiting to turn on the record he had made of Shaw's voice. I knew then that Lambert was the killer, saw through the devices he had used to shift suspicion away from himself. . ."

"Letters?" Mary Drayton gasped. "Devices? I—I don't understand."

Briefly Wendell explained to her and her husband the part of Lambert's scheme they hadn't heard. "The whole thing originated in the brain of a madman, driven insane with greed," he added. "Thank God he didn't succeed."

He bent again over the killer as he talked, found a hidden pocket inside of the coat. He drew out a small, square box, flipped open the lid. Inside, on a mound of cotton, rested a magnificent gem, glittering, sparkling with dazzling radiance. It was the diamond, the "Eye of Light"! But there was something sinister about its loveliness, something evil in its cold, scintillating beauty. Because of it three men had died. Because of it still another man—Paul Lambert—must go to his death in the electric chair.

"Yes, it is evil," Dave Wendell murmured. "And yet good sometimes comes out of evil." He turned to Mary Drayton,

saw her slim fingers tremble as he put the great jewel in her hand. "I think I know now why you wanted it so badly," he said softly. "I think I know why you told me it meant everything in the world to your husband. . ."

"We need it to make Philip look like a human being again," she whispered. "We've consulted a plastic surgeon who is sure he can restore Philip's face through a long series of treatment. But those treatments will cost a fortune. We need the diamond so that we can sell it and pay for them. . . ."

"Tonight Philip followed you to Benton's home, because he suspected that some scheme was afoot. He ran away after you saw him, and came to find me. We decided we had to act quickly or we might not get another chance to recover the diamond those devils had stolen from him. You caught me going through

Brant's pockets, and Philip had to knock you out so that we could continue our search. We went next to Melvin Shaw's house, but we didn't find him at home—for a very good reason. As a last resort we came here—and, thank God, Philip got down into the cellar just in time before that damnable fiend . . .

"Let's not talk about it anymore," Wendell interrupted kindly. "There's still a little job for me to do. It's time Lambert was brought to justice—"

He turned, recoiled with a sick gasp of horror as he stared at the unconscious form of the killer. Grim, poetic justice was already being meted out to Paul Lambert! The ants! They had crept out of their shattered glass prison, were swarming over the fiend's body! Lambert's own murder weapon had turned against him! He was dying as his victims had died—*without a face!*

**THE END**