

SEPT. 25c

# Weird Tales

## THE BLUE WOMAN

a weird mystery story

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Paul Ernst

Arlton Eadie

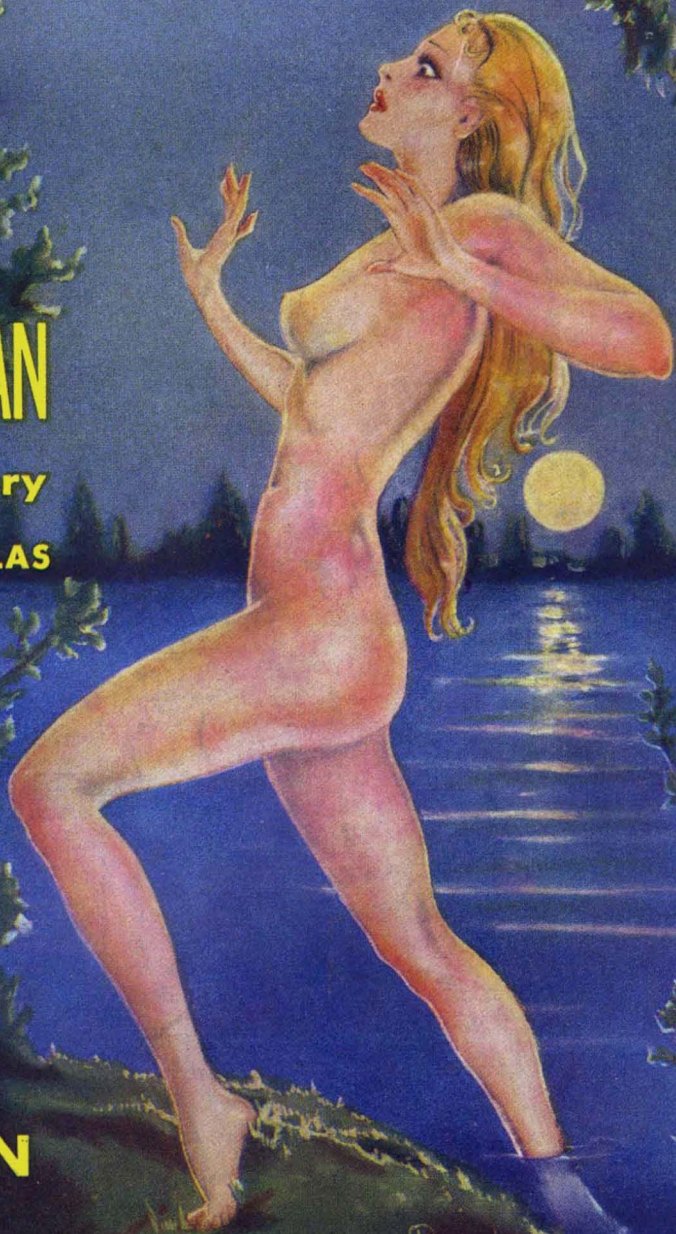
Robert Bloch

Clark Ashton Smith

*Another exciting*

## DOCTOR SATAN

*story in this issue*



Brundage



A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

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Volume 26

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Blue Woman

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

*The strange and eery mystery of a beautiful woman whose body glowed in the dark with an uncanny blue radiance*

LUDWIG MEUSEL rolled over irritably in the four-poster he had carved with his own hands. It had been the intention of the German wood-carver to ask his wife to come to bed. Five minutes before, she had turned out the light.

"Mona," he started to grumble, only to have the word die in his suddenly tight throat.

Meusel's plump body went rigid with terror. His Mona—what had happened to her? Fragmentary dark tales he had heard as a boy in Germany leapt into his mind. Tales of witchcraft, of werewolves. But how could such things touch his Mona, mother of his four children? And here in America?

A ray from the street light at the corner touched her lovely face and soft, midnight hair. By its faint radiance, her fair face was seemingly drained of all color. Her eyes were wide and dark with horror as she stared at her own reflection in the full-length mirror.

Meusel stared dazedly from the reflection to the woman, cold chills darting down his spine. No light touched her body, which was covered with a diaphanous nightgown. It was in shadow; and yet it was visible like a marble statue on which a pale-blue light was cast.

Visible? No, more than that—it glowed! Glowed with a faintly blue radiance! And the reflection in the mirror also glowed with a bluish light.

Meusel felt the hair rising on his head as his eyes darted about the room. No

optical illusion, this! There was no other light save the ray which touched his wife's face and hair—and it was yellow, not blue. There was no mirror which could throw the light on her body, save the one into which she stared with a horrified fascination.

Overwhelming was his desire to cry out: "Mona! Vat is? Effen in darkness your body is more bright than by day! *Mein Gott!*"

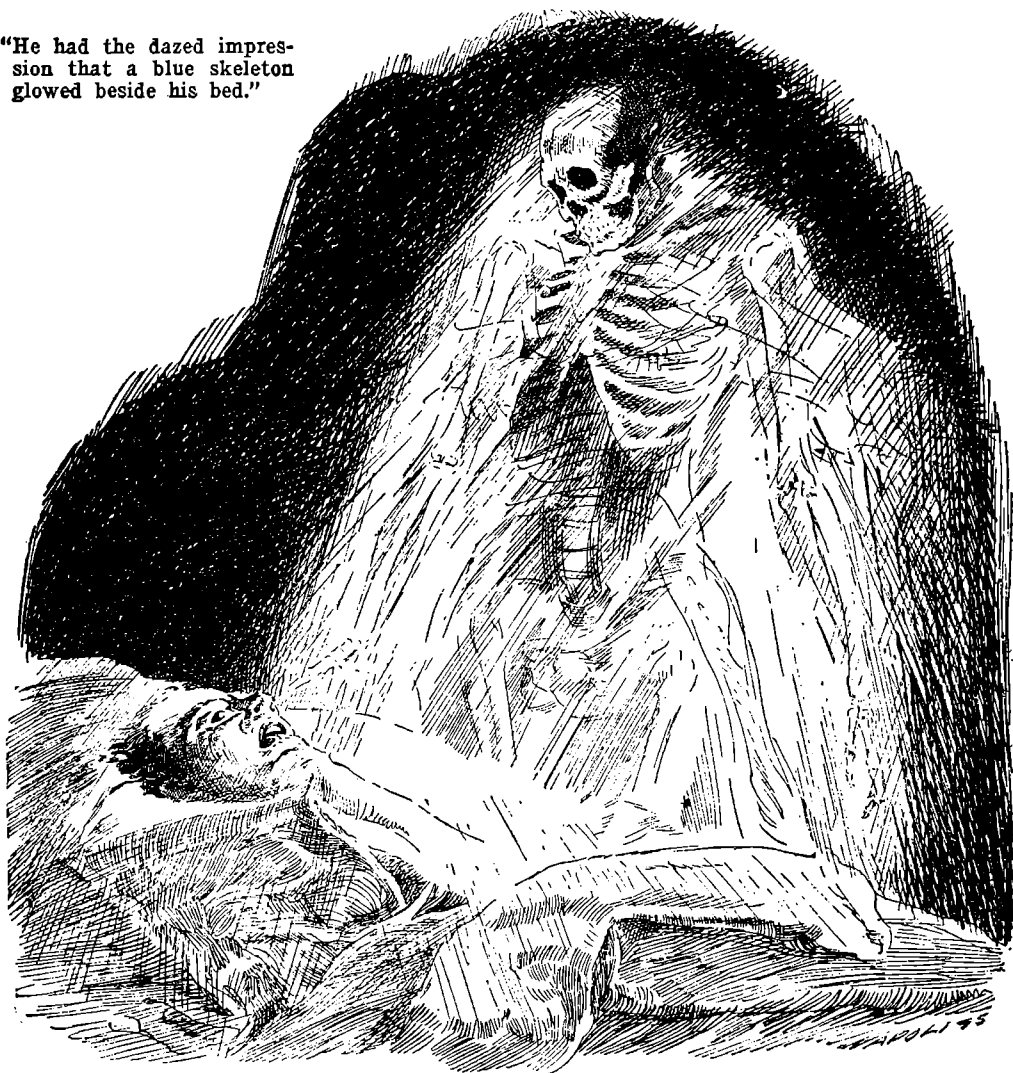
But Meusel's lips would not move, his tight throat would make no sound. Fear pinched his heart with icy fingers, as forgotten stories flashed in a dark procession through his mind. She had done something wrong, and this was her punishment? She was in league with unnamable creatures of the darkness? His gentle Mona! He could not believe it!

No! If she were evil, she would know! And yet she stared at her reflection with terror-wide eyes. She had discovered perhaps when she had turned out the light that her body glowed bluely in the mirror. She had stepped to the mirror, unbelieving, frightened. And now she could not draw her eyes away.

Meusel shuddered. Strong was his desire to flee from this thing which he did not understand. But he had been proud of his beautiful young wife. That pride even at this moment surmounted the clammy repugnance and fear which gripped him.

"Mona," he said in a voice he contrived to make petulant, "ain't you coming to bed, yet?"

"He had the dazed impression that a blue skeleton glowed beside his bed."



"Yes, Ludwig," she faltered.

Meusel felt himself shrinking from contact with her as she stepped into bed. Ashamed of his disloyalty, he could not goad himself to offer comfort. He was afraid even to question her. In the stories he had heard as a boy, exposure of a witch always brought calamity upon the exposer.

**S**HE lay face down, scarcely breathing. Presently, when she believed him asleep, her breathing quickened. Her

shoulders began shaking. She started to sob softly. She tried to check her sobs; and then they began afresh.

Meusel's damp body grew taut. He wanted to ask some of the numerous questions which were pounding in his head, but he did not dare. He was afraid to let her know that he knew. All night he lay stiffly by her side, afraid that if he once relaxed his vigilance she might do him some bodily harm. Like a witch—or a vampire!

In the morning, she was red-eyed from

weeping; but she made no explanation. By daylight, he was unable to observe that bluish radiance. But her face was pale and haggard. Steadily, month after month, Mona had been losing the freshness which, as an out-of-work chorus girl, she had possessed. Now her thinness was pronounced. His heart was pinched with pity as he left her at the breakfast table, staring at space with brooding eyes. All that day while he repaired antique furniture in his little shop below their living-quarters, Meusel thought of his young wife . . . and wondered.

Three months before, she had been working for the Kindall Watch Company. She had been brought home one day by a company doctor, and she was sobbing. Meusel was too dazed by his wife's strange behavior to comprehend much of what the doctor had told him about poisoning and "six months to live." Afterward, company officials had come with papers. They had explained, too, but Meusel had not understood very well. Mona had told him to sign a paper which she had referred to as a "release," and he had signed because he had trusted her knowledge of American ways. Then, to his amazement, they had given him a check for thirty thousand dollars. He had cashed it, but without a clear understanding of why it had been given to her. Something about illness; but he had not believed it serious.

He had built a little secret drawer behind the bureau, and put the money there. Mona had tried to talk to him about the thing later, making plans for her children; plans he was to carry out when she was gone. Meusel had told her to be still. It was not good, this talk of death! He put it down to some silly woman's notion. He would not permit her to discuss it. She was sick, perhaps, but she would be well again. He knew her better than any doctor.

Still, it came to Meusel as he went about his work that a change had come over Mona since that day the doctor had brought her home. She had brooded overmuch, and some mornings she had not gotten up. He had humored her, thinking she would get over her silly notion sooner or later. Now he wondered if she had tricked him about that thirty thousand dollars. Had she sold her soul for money? Why should a good woman be paid so much for an illness which did not impress him as being very genuine? Meusel was troubled.

That night the glowing electric blueness of her body was unmistakable. . . . So for three weeks the strain between them grew into a higher and higher barrier, and Meusel did not dare unburden himself.

Then one day when the visiting doctor had left, she looked more tired than usual. There was a grim quality about her mouth, a strange determination in her eyes.

**H**ARRASSED by doubt and fear, he could not sleep that night. When she believed him asleep, however, she arose. Meusel watched through half-closed eyes—watched in an agony of indecision. He saw her slip across the room to the bureau and silently pull it away from the wall. She was taking money from its secret hiding-place—but still he did not dare say anything. She slipped it into her purse, wrote something on a piece of paper, and then dressed.

To Meusel, this was the last staggering proof of her guilt. A vampire or witch she must be! He wanted to leap from bed to accuse her, but a paralyzing fear restrained him. If she possessed some evil power of which he knew nothing, she would not hesitate to bring that infernal power to use against him.

Not until she had left silently, closing

the door after her, did he dare move. Then he leapt from bed, and stole to the door. Opening it to a crack, he saw that the children's bedroom door was open. Perspiration broke out on Meusel's round face.

Witches — children! Confusedly old stories clamored through his mind. Witches eating children at their feasts! He could even remember an old color plate showing such a scene.

"*Mein Gott!*" Meusel thought. "Effen her own children, she would eat!"

His own fear forgotten in alarm over his children, he was about to rush out. But Mona appeared, her cheeks damp, sobbing softly. She was not carrying one of the children! Meusel went weak with relief. He watched her going down the stairs, and his tight throat would not permit him to say a word to stop her.

And then, when the outside door closed, he remembered the note. His hands trembled as he switched on the light and examined it. His breath caught short.

"*Ach, Himmel!*" he groaned. "She is a witch!"

Meusel put on his spectacles to read the note again:

Dearest Ludwig—

I am going away so that you and my darling children will always remember me as I now am. I have but little longer to live, even though you will not believe this. And with each passing day, I must grow more ugly.

You must not try to find me. In time you will learn what has happened. Try not to judge me too harshly. You made me very happy before this terrible thing happened, and I love you, Ludwig. That is why I cannot make my suffering yours.

I have taken some of my money. The rest you must keep for our children.

MONA.

"Ugly!" Meusel shuddered. "Ugly as a witch! She is telling me that she is becoming servant of evil one, yet, my beautiful Mona! *Ach!* That is what she mean by terrible thing which happen to her!"

ONE week later, Ludwig Meusel was seated uneasily in the inner sanctum of the offices bearing the name, "*Kenneth Keith, Private Investigator.*" The German wood-carver clasped and unclasped his plump hands nervously. He had just completed a recital of his wife's strange behavior, placing his own interpretation upon it. Across the desk from him sat a lean-faced young man with cool steel-gray eyes and an unruly thatch of red hair.

"You believe me, *ja?*" the German asked anxiously.

Ken Keith shifted his lean, greyhound body in the swivel chair, his wide mouth tightening. "I believe all you've told me. Two hours ago, I might not." He shrugged. "I believe you; that's enough. But why didn't you come to me before?"

Meusel stared uncomfortably at the carpet. "For veek I been asking myself, 'Vat vill I do?' Children ask me, 'Papa, ven vill mama come home?' I t'ink maybe yet I vill go to police. But they vill say, 'Meusel, vy you kill your wife, yet?' I didn't know vat to do. I see piece in paper saying that you solve crime that fool policemen——"

"Harchmond case?" asked young Keith.

"So? Vell, I come hoping maybe you find my Mona."

Keith tapped the desk with long fingers. "You say you were frightened of your wife for three weeks, and you want her back?"

Meusel's round face grew damp. "*Ach,* I didn't know vat I vant! Eff Mona, she don't return, I go to jail-house, no? Eff she return, I live in fear of I don't know vat!"

Keith rose. "Meusel, I advise you to report your wife's disappearance to the Missing Persons Bureau. That clears you. But it won't bring back your wife. It would be better if you'd forget her."

"So?" Meusel snorted. "You will not try to find her, no?"

"On the contrary," said Keith, "I'll bend every effort to finding her. But things won't ever be the same again for you, Meusel. You had better make up your mind to that."

The wood-carver went out shaking his head. When the outside door had closed, Keith punched a button on his desk. Miss Tibbs entered primly. Her severe mouth settled in a disapproving line as she watched him slip an automatic into a holster under his arm.

He glanced up. "Miss Tibbs, among the clippings I asked you to file this morning was one on a blue woman at Lake Placid. Please bring it to me."

"Quite ridiculous, I must say! Anyone knows that no woman——"

"Is blue," finished Keith. "But this woman, as it happens, appears to radiate a blue light by dark."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Miss Tibbs.

"One other thing," said Keith. "Reserve a seat on the chair-car on the N. Y. C."

"You have an appointment with Mr. Fordley in fifteen minutes," she said reprovingly.

"Money!" Keith snapped his fingers. "This is a test of skill, Miss Tibbs. The thrill of the chase. Can't you understand that?"

Miss Tibbs' mouth pursed primly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I believe you, Miss Tibbs. Now will you get that clipping?"

Miss Tibbs stiffly departed, returning in two minutes with a clipping over a Lake Placid date-line. It ran:

Justin Kindall, son of the famous watch manufacturer, the late Hugo Kindall, was found supposedly murdered on the densely wooded shore of Lake Stevens at ten o'clock last night by his brother, Rex Kindall, near whose summer cabin the corpse was discovered. Evidence pointing to murder with a knife was further complicated by

the statement of Rex Kindall's gardener that he had heard a cry about nine-forty-five and had seen a yellow-haired, scantily clothed "blue woman" hurrying through the woods. He maintains that the mystery woman's color was not the blueness of cold, possible in one flimsily clad, but had a blue quality which he could see despite the darkness. Because of his improbable story, Todd Haskall, the gardener, is being held for further questioning.

Ken Keith had kept the clipping because he worked on the theory that every crime repeats itself. Miss Tibbs had filed thousands of clippings he had given her for similar reasons.

The story Ludwig Meusel had told him, and the clipping on his desk, were totally without parallel. That it was the same woman, Keith did not doubt. Todd Haskall had everything to lose and nothing to gain by sticking to his story of the "blue woman." And Meusel was too unimaginative a man to have invented his story.

No! there must be a "blue woman," and that woman must be Mona Meusel. She had worked for the Kindall Watch Company . . . and now one of the brothers, Justin Kindall, had died from a knife-thrust. Strong connection—but no motives! And why should a woman possessing thirty thousand dollars suddenly disappear, only to reappear under damning circumstances? Meusel had been extremely vague about the nature of her "accident" at the factory.

And why did she emit a blue radiance?

The case whispered of black magic; of unexplainable, sinister things Ken Keith had witnessed in Haiti—and never understood; of voodoo and vampirism. And yet it had individual aspects which made it in Keith's experience a case without parallel.

Thoughtfully he picked up the bag which always stood packed beside his desk, and strode purposefully out. Miss Tibbs was signing for a telegram. Keith tore it open. It read:



Sheriff botching matters—Read paper for story of brother's murder—Believe Haskall innocent—Could you come immediately?

COBB KINDALL.

Keith tossed the telegram to his secretary. "Wire Kindall at Lake Placid that I'm on my way." And he was gone.

COBB KINDALL met Keith at the station. A quietly dressed, ruddy-cheeked man with a trim gray mustache, he appeared ill at ease as he escorted the lanky, red-headed detective to his limousine. When the limousine was flying toward the town, he turned.

"Ghastly business, this, Keith! You read the accounts?"

The detective nodded.

"Of course this blue woman—sensational newspaper stuff! I've talked to Haskall; told him to soft-pedal that wild tale. But he won't budge—stubborn old fellow, Haskall. Been with the family for years—devoted to Justin. He couldn't have done it. That's why you're here."

"Sorry," said Keith. "I don't work that way. If you want me to find who killed your brother—that's different."

Kindall gave him a sharp glance; then shrugged. "A nice distinction. Very well; that's what I do want. It will clear Haskall, I'm sure."

"And may," Keith suggested, "involve someone else."

"You mean Rex?" His voice was terse. Then his eyes shadowed. "Yes, it may involve any of us. Even I may be the murderer, Keith. But you must find him. You see, none of us is safe until he is found."

"Some partnership agreement?"

"My father's will," said Kindall. "The watch company he built up was left in trust. My brothers, Justin, Rex, and Robin, and my only sister, Sarah, each owns an equal portion—or receives an equal share of the earnings, rather—until

we die. The provision of the trust is that none of us may sell our shares; but in the event of a death of the original sons, their share may pass to male heirs, but only to the extent their father would have benefited. I'm the only one whom that clause would benefit, for my brothers and my sister have not married. But you see the point, Keith. Justin's death gives each of us now a quarter of the income from the trust, instead of a fifth as was the case while he was alive. Each of us, you might say, stood to gain by his death."

"Am I to believe that you suspect one of your brothers or your sister?"

"Emphatically not! I can believe nothing of the sort!"

"You would prefer to believe that that blue woman——"

"What rot, Keith! If Haskall were a drinking man——" Kindall shook his well-shaped head. "He must have seen a woman. But if she were blue, as he so preposterously insists, how could he tell what color she was in the darkness?"

Keith smiled grimly, remembering Meusel's words.

"Am I to understand that the five Kindalls were staying at Rex Kindall's summer lodge?"

"No; at mine. Rex's lodge is across a small arm of the lake from mine. We were having a reunion—business and pleasure. Justin went over to see Rex last night, trying to patch up a trifling quarrel over a disagreement in company policy."

"Rex," said Keith, "is in the habit of disagreeing with the others?"

"He's touchy. No; don't form any preconceived notions about Rex! He built his own lodge to be away from us; but he's one of us."

Keith was touched by Cobb Kindall's loyalty. Rare, that quality! He might be ruthless in running down the murderer of his brother. But until that one were

proved guilty, it would remain one for all and all for one.

Keith thought again of the blue woman, wondering where she came into the picture. Motives! He could see no motive for her; plenty for each of the Kindalls. Why had she been paid \$30,000? For an "accident," as Meusel thought? Or was that merely wool over Meusel's eyes to hide the real reason? Had a secret love affair existed between Mona Meusel and Justin Kindall, dating back to her chorus-girl days? Was the money blackmail? Why, then, had she killed him? Surely after living a circum-spect life for eight years, an affair of the past could not come up to plague her. Blackmail—an idea!

"Suppose," Keith said slowly, "that Todd Haskall had come upon you in the act of killing Justin, Mr. Kindall. Would he have revealed the murderer?"

"Heavens, man!" Cobb Kindall cried hoarsely. "Don't you suppose I've considered that angle? The possibility that Rex——" His jaw hardened. "No, it's that woman! It must be her!"

"Some woman in Justin's past, perhaps?"

Kindall smiled bleakly. "He had a period of sowing wild oats."

"I see. And Rex?"

"Not Rex! He's a confirmed woman-hater! . . . Well, here we are. Mortuary. Nothing significant in Justin's wound, I think."

**A**N OBSEQUIOUS attendant ushered them into a basement room. As he reached for the light switch, Kindall said huskily:

"No lights yet, Tabor."

Gripping Keith's arm, he piloted him through the darkened room.

There was a charnel scent in the air which caused cold shivers to crawl down Keith's back. The room had the cold

dankness of a tomb. Ahead, however, was a faint radiance which grew brighter as he neared the opposite wall. He could feel Kindall's hand trembling on his arm.

Kindall stopped, and coughed—a quick, nervous cough. The charnel scent was so strong that Keith's flesh seemed to crawl. His eyes becoming adjusted to the darkness, Keith realized with a start that the radiance was some phosphorescent substance on the forehead of the corpse. The glow seemed to make the glassy eyes of the dead man glitter. Strange in this dark room! The detective's poise was shaken.

He thought of obscene symbols painted on the forehead in India. Of voodoo marks. The very simple explanation of the symbol escaped him because he could not avoid trying to find a connection between it and the apparent occult powers exemplified by the blue woman.

"Curious thing!" Kindall's strangely hoarse voice made him start. "Figure one—done with some radio-active paint."

"Of course!" Keith's voice was strained. "I was looking for something difficult. Naturally you've noticed the design of that figure one."

"My God, man! Could I avoid doing that? It's the same shape as the figure one painted on the Kindall See-at-Nite clocks. Must be radium paint, too."

"Done," said Keith, thinking of Mona Meusel, "by someone who has worked in your plant. Peculiar shape, that one. Practise would be needed to imitate it."

"But what does it mean?"

"There are twelve figures on a clock," said Keith dryly, "and only four Kindalls remaining."

There was a long pause, during which the silence hung heavy.

"Six," said Kindall grimly. "My two boys. Seven, if you count my wife, who could never be an heir to the trust."

"Seven, then," said Keith. "You are

faced by something that your reason rejects as impossible, Kindall. A blue woman! And yet I have talked with the husband of that blue woman no later than this morning! Have you ever heard of a certain Mona Meusel?"

"Can't say I have. But, Keith, a blue woman! Preposterous!"

"Preposterous—but true! She is not, however, really blue. Haskall simply described his impression. The woman does give forth blue emanations, at least at night."

"Like the emanations from the figure one on Justin's forehead?"

"Not precisely, Kindall. We can scarcely suppose any woman could paint her whole body with a radium paint."

"No," Kindall agreed. "She would be hideously burned."

"Exactly! So there must be another explanation."

Kindall called to the waiting attendant: "Lights, Tabor."

**E**XCEPT for the head, the body was covered with a sheet. This Keith removed to make a brief examination. There were three wounds, one of which had pierced the heart.

"The sheriff has the knife?"

"It wasn't found."

"Suppose we talk now with the sheriff and Haskall."

From neither man, however, could Keith glean any important information.

They departed in the limousine for the boat landing on Lake Stevens, the wilder of the two lakes touching the town of Lake Placid. As they walked down the hill to the landing with Curry, Kindall's capable driver, Keith glimpsed a lodge here and there through the trees bordering the lake. Save for these evidences of civilization, the gloom-shrouded lake might have been located anywhere in the Canadian wilds.

They climbed into the sea-sled, and Curry tinkered with the engine. A few minutes later, it was laying the black waters back in two white folds as it rose on the glistening surface. The sun was setting, and there was a chill in the air.

"One thing I forgot to tell you," Kindall shouted, trying to raise his voice above the roar of powerful cylinders firing in rotation. "The Countess Eritha Koeler is staying with us. German countess, in her own right. Lovely woman!"

Keith nodded.

"Of course she wanted to leave after this—this tragedy. But this sea-sled is our only means of transportation, Rex's speed-boat being temporarily out of commission. We had to take this boat into town with the body. Couldn't ask the countess to accompany us on *that* trip! And I haven't been able to get back for her. A million details!"

It was a distinct shock to Keith when, rounding the next wooded point, he saw a brilliantly lighted two-story log lodge through the trees. Lighted as if for a ball! The towering evergreens pressing close to the lodge, however, explained the lights. A gloomy, depressing place it must be, at best. And now, after the murder of one of the family! . . .

Kindall was pointing at a log cabin across a small neck of water about a quarter of a mile wide. "Rex's place."

Big trees overshadowed it, making it dwindle into the lengthening curtains of darkness. The place gave an impression of being overgrown, neglected and desolate. Somewhere in the dripping undergrowth near the murk-shrouded cabin a murder had been committed the night before. A cry had shattered the awesome silence of those woods. Haskall had seen a "blue woman"—or had he seen Rex Kindall killing his brother? And if Mona Meusel had murdered Justin, what could

have been her motive? Haskall claimed that the "blue woman" had yellow hair—and Mona Meusel's was midnight black. An illusion of that startled moment—or a fabrication to protect Rex? And how could any fabrication of Todd Haskall's come so close to the amazing facts presented by Ludwig Meusel?

A swarthy, heavy-set man with dark, glowering brows came down to the boat landing to meet them. "Is this any time to be inviting guests, Cobb?" he demanded sullenly.

"My brother, Rex," Cobb Kindall explained. "This is Mr. Keith, a private detective I called in, Rex."

"Your pretty countess has been pacing the floor all day," Rex said, ignoring the introduction. "If you must invite people here, why can't you remember them?"

"I'll see that she is taken to Lake Placid the first thing in the morning. But I'm not going to ask Curry to make another trip today."

"A private detective!" Rex snorted. "What next, Cobb? Haven't we enough trouble here already?"

Cobb calmly turned to Curry. "We'll be leaving for town about nine."

"The sheriff was poking around here," Rex went on heatedly. "Of course he didn't have a big enough boat to transport the countess' luggage. You'd think she was coming for a summer."

"Mr. Keith," Cobb said evenly, "has a theory about that blue woman."

"Paugh!" Rex grunted. "Blue woman!"

He stalked down to the landing, climbed into a small row-boat, and rowed toward his cabin, his bull-like neck set at a stiff angle.

"Rex and Justin were very close," Cobb said, as they walked up the stone flagging. "Naturally he's cut pretty deeply by what's happened."

A DAPPER man just under middle age rose languidly from a porch chair as they ascended the steps. "Hi, Cobb," he said breezily.

Cobb frowned. The man wore white flannels and a brown jacket coat.

"My youngest brother, Robin," he explained. "Mr. Keith."

"Glad to know you, Keith," Robin said, gripping the detective's hand heartily. "Family are all down on me. Say I should be wearing black. Can't see it! Ugly color, black. Depressing. Aren't we depressed enough already? Need something to give us a lift, eh?"

"Dinner ready?" Cobb asked curtly.

"Fifteen minutes. Just time to wash up, Keith. Glad you're here."

Robin showed the red-headed detective upstairs to a front room overlooking the dark, shimmering lake. "Justin's room," he explained. "Family will howl, but you'll have to make the best of it. No other suitable for a guest. Countess Eritha here, you know. We seldom all descend on Cobb *en masse*. When we do, it pinches."

Keith had scarcely washed when there was a light knock on his door. Opening it, he saw a frail woman. Peculiar-looking, she was, and yet somehow hauntingly lovely. Her hair was done in red-gold coils about her head; her skin was dead-white, her blue eyes haggard.

"I heard about you from Cobb," she said breathlessly. "I—I'm the Countess Eritha Koeler."

Keith nodded.

She glanced uneasily up and down the vacant hall.

"I—I'm terrified here," she faltered. "I didn't know, until I came here, what strange people the Kindalls are. Except Cobb Kindall. And this lodge! I have the feeling every minute that something—something terrible is about to happen."

Keith waited, saying nothing.

"I—I wonder if—if you would take me to town tonight. I can't bear to stay under this roof another night. They are all such—such odd people, *ja?*"

Keith pitied her. She looked so frail and shaken. But he shook his red head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But how could I take you? I could not operate the boat. And I understand you have a lot of luggage."

"*Ja!*" She seemed to wilt. "In the morning, then, I will leave. It is uncomfortable to be a guest when such a thing have happened, *nein?*"

WHEN Keith entered the dining-room, he saw at the head of the table a spinster with badly dyed yellow hair. Neither the hair dye nor the heavy application of cosmetics could hide the hardness of the woman's eyes and face, nor the lines etched there by time. Keith knew even before the introduction that this must be the sister, Sarah Kindall.

She acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod. When Keith was seated, the family began with their fruit cocktails. The uncomfortable silence was broken only occasionally when Robin addressed some flippant remark to the countess.

Finally, the meal finished, and cigarettes lighted, Robin grinned at his sister. "Lucky the sheriff didn't take you into custody, Sarah."

Her eyes narrowed behind the smoke from her cigarette, grew hard.

"Explain yourself, Robin."

He shrugged. "Blue woman—yellow hair. Sort of fits you, Sarah."

She crushed out her cigarette, almost savagely. "Your humor," she said icily, "is in poor form, Robin."

"As always," he said cheerfully, winking at Keith.

"Come, Keith," Cobb Kindall said hastily to the detective. "We'll have our cigars in the garden."

A small, rustic garden it was, taking advantage of standing trees and a running spring. For a long time the two men walked and smoked in silence. Then, abruptly, Cobb Kindall remarked:

"Wonder Sarah doesn't kill Robin sometime. Always flippant. Sarah has no sense of humor."

"All you Kindalls are different," Keith said. "Was your brother Justin like any of you?"

"Like Robin, a little. Better sense of the fitness of things, though."

"He irritated your sister as much as Robin?" Keith asked casually.

Cobb gave him a sidelong glance. "Sometimes more. She excuses Robin. Youngest brother." Then he added quickly: "Never meant anything, however. Sarah and Justin just never hit it off."

"Little I can do tonight," Keith said. "Think I'll turn in. Tomorrow I'll go over to your brother's."

"Yes. Rex will be in better humor tomorrow."

"With your permission, I'll go over some letters that are on Justin's desk. Just possible—feminine handwriting, you know."

"Go ahead, Keith. I'm putting everything in your hands."

WHEN they entered the sumptuous lodge, it was ablaze with lights. Robin stood gazing into the fire, a cigarette in one hand.

Cobb said: "Robin, you'd think there was a celebration!"

Robin smiled—a whimsical smile. "Wouldn't you? Fräulein Koeler's idea. Says she hates darkness. Not a bad idea. I shoved up the voltage. Sort of human, the countess."

Cobb's face relaxed. "She's retired?" Robin nodded. "Just."

Keith went upstairs, leaving the two

brothers to talk. For nearly an hour he read Justin's letters. Nothing pertinent in the lot. Keith sighed, dropped onto his bed to think for some minutes, and then retired:

A light sleeper, he was awakened by a faint splashing sound. He automatically glanced at his watch. Two-five. Hearing the sound again, Keith jumped out of bed.

From the window he could see nothing for a moment. Stars above, but no moon. The opposite shore was drenched in blackness. The lake, a dark, glistening mirror. A mirror broken in one point by a ripple of bluish light! Keith tensed. Yellow hair streamed on the water. Slim white arms rose and sliced the water.

Keith's pulses pounded. A faint bluish radiance seemed to form an aura around the swimmer. The rising and diving arms were a pale, luminous blue. The blue woman!

Her face he could not see in the darkness, nor from that distance. She was swimming toward this shore. Returning from Rex's cabin? She would strike shore a quarter of a mile from the house. Her nude body gleamed with a ghostly radiance as the swimmer stroked swiftly toward shore.

That yellow hair! Keith thought of Sarah Kindall. She was strong, lean and hard. Capable, he guessed, of a long swim, a long hike, a long ride. But—capable of murder? He remembered her eyes as she had looked at Robin through her cigarette smoke. Hard eyes!

Keith slipped hurriedly into his clothes, and dashed down the stairs. From the front porch, he saw the swimmer rise out of the water and wade leisurely toward shore. That luminous quality about her made her unreal—an apparition.

Keith was not to be deceived. He flew down the steps. Silent as was his flight,

it was not sufficiently so. He saw the yellow head turn quickly. Then the ghostly figure dashed into the woods.

Keith bolted. He heard the crackling of underbrush ahead, and came up short in a blind alley of intertwined vines and brush. He veered off toward the lake, found a trail skirting the shore, and plunged along it. He could no longer hear the crackling.

He paused, his heart pounding. No sound! Then, far off, the hoot of an owl caused a sudden chill to dart down his spine.

The detective started ahead. Coming to the point where he had seen the blue woman emerge from the water, he plowed through the brush. Striking a match, he searched for footprints. There were none! A moss-covered log jutted out into the water; slight, damp depressions in the moss showed where the swimmer had walked. But he could not tell the size of the swimmer's foot. The match burned Keith's fingers, and he dropped it.

It occurred to him that this blue woman might not be Mona Meusel at all. Possible there were two such women in the world? Not knowing what caused that luminous blueness, it was hard even to guess. Certain, however, that the swimmer's hair was similar to Sarah Kindall's.

Returning to the trail, he moved along slowly, striking matches and looking for a chance footprint.

Suddenly a branch cracked far behind him—a sound like the crack of a gun in the stillness. Keith whirled, and raced down the trail. Another branch cracked, and another. But the runner must be far ahead of him.

Arriving at the garden, Keith circled the house. But the sounds had ceased,

and nowhere could he find any trace of the swimmer.

**A**BRUPTLY a shrill cry set Keith's nerves quivering. He rounded the house at a run, and darted up the stairs, two at a time. A light was switched on, and Keith saw Robin at the switch.

"Beastly habit of yours, Keith. Screaming at night!"

Keith felt certain Robin would joke on his own death-bed; but he was in no mood for humor. His lean face grim, he scanned the faces of the people who stood in shaken silence in the hall. Cobb, Robin, Sarah Kindall! And then Keith's jaw hardened. Sarah's hair lay in damp, yellow tendrils on her purple dressing-gown. *Damp!*

That could wait! The Countess Eritha!

She opened the door at that moment, her eyes wide with horror.

"Oh!" she cried tremulously. "I knew I shouldn't spend another night in this house!"

Keith observed that there was a peculiar symbol on her forehead. A figure three!

"What made you scream?" he asked.

"I—I don't know, exactly. Perhaps I dreamed it. But I thought something damp touched my forehead. I screamed. A ghostly blue figure vanished through the window. *Acb!* Is this house haunted?"

Keith slipped past the countess, and darted to the window. A roof three feet below the window connected all the second-story windows of the lodge. He struck a match. Sure enough! A wet mark!

He returned to the hall. "Did you know," he asked the countess, "that there is a figure three on your forehead?"

Her mouth parted, and she put a startled hand on her forehead. The damp

figure blurred. A frightened light entered her blue eyes.

"Phosphorescent or radium paint?" she asked.

Keith shook his head. "Not this time!"

"But—but," the frail woman faltered, "what does it mean? I heard someone say that—that there was a figure one on Justin Kindall's forehead. Now a figure three!"

"Perhaps," Keith said, striding over to Sarah, "Miss Kindall can explain."

"I?" she asked. "Just what do you mean, young man?"

Keith touched her hair. She drew away haughtily.

"Your hair," he said, "is damp."

She eyed him coldly. "Is it any of your business when I wash my hair?"

"When did you wash it?"

"An hour ago, perhaps. I read late. I'm a poor sleeper."

"So I observed. And a good swimmer?"

"Sarah's an excellent swimmer," Cobb said. "But what's the meaning of this inquisition, Keith?"

Keith turned. "Just this. I saw a yellow-haired woman swimming across the bay. I dashed out, but she slipped away in the bushes. Now the Countess Eritha is awakened by someone entering her room—awakened perhaps in time to avoid being killed. And there is a number three on her forehead. Where is the number two? Rex Kindall is unaccounted for!"

Cobb stared at Sarah incredulously. "Sarah," he said grimly. "If——"

She turned on him coldly. "It's a lie! I have been in my room since nine! If you don't order this impertinent young——"

"Sarah!" Cobb said curtly. "This is not a matter of form. Did you or did you not——"

An arctic coldness in her narrowed eyes, Sarah stared at her brother contemptuously. "I'm not in the habit of having my statements questioned."

"I have no authority here," Keith said, "except the authority of any citizen to restrain a law-breaker. But with your consent, Mr. Kindall, I suggest that your sister's windows be nailed, and her door locked—from the outside. I further suggest that someone stand guard at that door while you and I row over to your brother's cabin. The significance of a number three on the Countess Eritha's forehead worries me."

Sarah's body shook with anger. "Cobb, if you permit this insolent fool to lock me up like a common hoodlum——"

Cobb said icily: "Enough of that, Sarah! If you're innocent, you can surely have no objections. And I'm sure you are."

"Then why——" she began stormily, only to be interrupted by Cobb's demand that Robin awaken Curry and find a hammer and nails.

Sarah stalked into her room, her eyes wrathful. Nor did she speak while her window was being nailed. The door was locked from the outside and Robin placed on guard.

**K** EITH bent to the oars as soon as Cobb Kindall was seated in the stern of the boat. Cobb's face had lost some of its ruddiness; the scene with his sister had evidently unnerved him. His only sister, under the cloud of being a suspected murderess!

He said nothing as the oars clicked in their locks, only leaned forward with a strained expression in his eyes.

When the boat drew up alongside the narrow landing, he leapt out, and without waiting to moor the boat, strode swiftly toward the cabin. Keith tied up the boat, and followed at a run.

A dread had settled over his heart, and it twisted sharply as Cobb called shakily, "Rex! Oh, Rex!" He felt a surge of sympathy for the older man as the cries echoed across the lake, and died away.

The front door of the cabin was open. Keith's lean jaw hardened as he followed Cobb inside. By the flickering light of a match held in Cobb's shaking hand, the interior looked bare and unkempt.

Cobb hurried on, calling his brother's name. A small hall led back from the living-room. At the first door Cobb paused, and struck a match. Suddenly it fell from his nerveless fingers. He uttered a choked sound. He gripped the door-frame.

Keith hurried up, seizing Cobb's arm.

"I'm all right," he said dully.

On a bed lay a supine figure. By the faint starlight coming through the open window, he observed a knife rising from the man's chest like a lean tombstone. On a stand by the bed was a jar containing some gleaming substance—radium paint, perhaps.

And on the forehead of the dead man was a gleaming figure two!

**K** EITH lay in bed a short time later, his head throbbing with the problems confronting him. Curry guarded the door of Sarah's room, and silence had once more descended on the house.

His case against Sarah Kindall was fragile; it would not stand up in any court. Yellow hair—nothing more. Damp yellow hair! For a time after his return, he had worked on the lethal knife with a white powder—and found no prints. The jar containing the radium paint was similarly wiped to remove finger prints. Or, perhaps, the murderer or murderess had used gloves which had later been dropped into the lake.

Motives—he had plenty of those! Sarah Kindall was apparently at cross-



purposes with each of her brothers. She stood to gain tremendously by an increased income from the trust holding her father's watch company. Possible, too, that she felt them somehow to blame for not in some way helping her to find a marriage partner. Still, Keith wasn't satisfied.

Sarah was strong and sinewy. She could have swum to Rex Kindall's cabin and back easily, even carrying the small jar of radium paint and a knife. But by what means could she have made her body take on a luminous blue quality? He had not seen her except in a lighted room.

Then he remembered Robin's remark about the countess. *She wanted lights—many lights!* Why? For the reason Robin suggested, or another? She had screamed, and declared that a blue woman had entered her room. Was that attack merely a fabrication to throw attention from herself?

But her hair was red-gold. That was not so significant, however, as the fact that there was something peculiar-looking about her, a false note Keith couldn't place. Disguise always gave that effect, just as Sarah's yellow hair made her look odd. And the countess didn't like darkness!

Keith reviewed the facts about Mona Meusel which had been given him by her husband. And finally he fell asleep, promising himself that he would learn the countess' background on the morrow.

He was awakened by a soft hand on his face—awakened with nerves taut and quivering. In that brief instant of start before he could fully orient himself to his surroundings, Keith saw a glowing blue figure. The woman was dressed in a gossamer nightgown. It seemed to him that he could see through the gown, through the woman's body. He had the

dazed impression that a blue skeleton glowed beside his bed; that the bones of the woman's body were shadows like the bones of a person's body under a fluoroscope.

That fleeting impression of a glowing skeleton beside his bed robbed Keith of power for immediate action. Too late, he heard something hissing downward. A club, a "billy"—he did not know what. But he tried to roll out from under that swiftly descending arc. Failed! The heavens seemed to explode before his eyes, and Keith felt himself falling—falling—falling, through a star-powdered sky. . . .

When his smarting eyes jerked open, he could see nothing for a few moments in that darkened room. His hands were bound, his legs bound, and when he tried to roll, he found that sheets held him to the bed, probably tied to the bed-posts. Tape across his lips made outcry impossible.

And then he caught a luminous brightness out of the corner of one eye, and jerked his head to the side. Leaning over the table by his bed was the blue woman! The room was dark, but in that glowing face he thought he could see haggard eyes below an aura of short, black hair. Mona Meusel?

"I'm sorry you must die," she said. "But you cannot interfere with my plans. There seems no other way."

The pulse in Keith's throat throbbed. The voice was mellow and deep. Not the accented voice of the countess! Not the dry, rustling voice of Sarah Kindall! A disguised voice? He did not think so; it seemed altogether natural to the speaker. A cultivated voice such as you might find among the better actors.

Actor! Mona Meusel was a chorus girl. Perhaps she had played small bits now and then.

He heard the tinkle of glass as the woman raised the glass stopper of a bottle. Nauseous fumes reached Keith's nostrils. A sickening chill swept over him. Chlorine gas! So that's what she was doing with the big bottle! Keith understood then what had kept her so long in the room. She had been stopping up door and window cracks. She would leave him with that deadly gas, to choke, gag, and finally die!

She slipped silently to the window—a livid blue streak of light. Then she stepped out on the roof, and silently closed the window.

Keith's head was already reeling. As the soft patter of her bare feet died away, he wrenched at the ropes the blue woman had made of his sheets. They held! He twisted his mouth, trying to break the adhesion of the tape over it, and although he felt as if the skin were being torn off his lips, he could not break its hold.

His body became drenched as the gas crept down into his lungs. Soft hands seemed to be choking off his breath. Desperately, Keith wrenched at the bonds holding his ankles and wrists.

He felt ill, frightfully weak. Balls of fire seemed to break before his pain-filled eyes. But he could feel the flesh being seared on one wrist. The strip of linen was giving!

Keith jerked his doubled fists back and forth, trying to bridge his body an inch or so by leaning his weight on his head and feet. Enough clearance to give freer play to his hands. The strips were slipping. But he was working blindly now. Waves of blackness swept over him. He jerked, wrenched and tore, like an animal caught in a trap. His wrists felt damp. Blood! And then the strips gave way!

Suddenly a shot shattered the silence. He heard a scream. Another shot! Then running steps; Curry's excited voice.

His senses were ebbing—and there was help not many feet away. But he could expect no assistance!

Keith reached out dazedly, put the stopper on the bottle, and hurled it toward the window. Glass crashed. Fresh air entered the room. For a moment, it intoxicated Keith, and his head reeled.

Then he broke the bonds holding him to the bed, and swung his legs over. For a moment, he put his head down to clear his senses, but the heavy, descending greenish-yellow gas was stronger near the floor.

Holding his breath to keep out the fiery fumes, Keith untied his ankles, and staggered to the window. He gulped in fresh air, but his lungs seemed to be afire. He threw up the other windows, then staggered drunkenly toward the door.

Unlocking it, he pulled it open.

**T**HERE were voices in Sarah Kindall's room, and the door was open. The hall was flooded with lights. As Keith staggered across the hall, the Countess Eritha Koeler came running toward him, her negligee drawn close about her. Her blue eyes went wide.

"Mr. Keith, what's the matter?"

He forced a twisted smile, and stumbled toward the open door. Cobb Kindall came out, his face gray and drawn. Robin and Curry followed him, and even Robin's blithe spirits seemed to have been crushed.

"Dead!" Cobb said heavily.

"Your sister?" Keith asked incredulously.

Cobb nodded; then his eyes became bleak.

"Keith!" he said sternly. "You heard those shots! Why didn't you come sooner? Whoever shot my sister from the roof outside must have escaped by now."

"On the contrary," said Keith grimly.

"What do you mean?" Cobb asked.

"I'd like to ask a few questions. I have a theory. You make the See-at-Nite clocks in the Kindall factory, do you not, Mr. Kindall?"

"Certainly," said Cobb.

"The figures and hands of those clocks are painted with radium paint so that they can be seen at night, are they not?"

"Yes. We have a whole staff of girls doing that work. Recently we had some unfortunate results in the factory due to insufficient knowledge of radium."

"That's what I'm getting at," Keith said grimly. "Those unfortunate results, I take it, occurred to the girls painting the figures and hands of your See-at-Nite clocks?"

Cobb nodded his gray head. "The girls 'pointed' the brushes they used with their mouths."

"Thereby," Keith said, "getting radium poisoning."

"Yes," admitted Cobb Kindall. "Six cases were discovered less than four months ago. Since that time, there have been strict orders against putting the paint brush in the mouth, and all the girls must wear a special type of glove when working with radium paint."

"Now, as I understand it," Keith said, "radium poisoning kills in a very short time after it's discovered. Six months, perhaps?"

Cobb nodded. "It depends on how long and how often a girl has pointed her brush with her mouth before the poisoning shows itself."

"Did the Kindall Watch Company make restitution for the damage those six women suffered—say, to the extent of \$30,000?"

"Exactly that," said Cobb.

"I see. Now I asked you once before if you remembered a certain Mona Meusel. You said you didn't. Think again,

Mr. Kindall, and see if you can't recall the name. Among those six girls——"

Cobb's eyes shadowed. "Yes," he interrupted, "I believe that Mona Meusel was one of them, though that's not my end of the business. Robin, do you recall the name?"

"Mona Meusel was among the six," answered Robin.

"After receiving that money, Mona Meusel felt that she was not yet sufficiently revenged. She was determined to seek out every one of the Kindalls—and kill them. Perhaps in a company bulletin sent her she learned that the heads of the firm were holding a meeting up here at Lake Stevens. She left \$25,000 of the money with her husband for the care of her children. The other \$5,000 she was devoting to vengeance. She bought a number of trunks, and a wardrobe. And in the trunks were also other things. Radium paint—chlorine gas—certain weapons.

"She registered at one of the best hotels as the Countess Eritha Koeler. Ordinarily it would be hard to play such a part convincingly. Mona Meusel had certain natural advantages. She had doubtless learned from her husband, who had done wood carving for some of the nobility of Germany, their ways and manners and dress. She was also a specialist in make-up, and knew how to act a part convincingly."

The countess' face was deathly pale. In a heavily accented voice she cried: "Mr. Kindall, will you stand for these allegations?"

He looked from the countess to Keith, and back again.

Robin's voice was harsh with criticism: "Keith, this is ridiculous. I have seen Mona Meusel. While there's a certain resemblance, Mrs. Meusel had long, black hair."

"And a fair skin," said Keith. "Mr. Kindall, just how and where did you meet the countess?"

"At the Rochester House. The manager introduced her to us. Being fascinated by her charm, we invited her to be our guest, and she readily accepted."

"I dare say," Keith observed dryly. "It fitted her plans perfectly."

"But if Mona Meusel is the countess," Robin protested, "why was the countess attacked?"

"She was not attacked. The attack was faked!"

The countess drew herself up, her eyes flashing. Her lips curved in a contemptuous smile. "You are being very droll, Mr. Keith."

Her manner and her tones almost convinced Keith of a mistake. But he continued doggedly: "I'm not familiar with radium poisoning. But isn't it conceivable that it may make a person's body glow blue at night? That was the way Meusel described the effects of the poisoning on his wife. He said there was a luminous blue quality about her, and that she first observed it herself after she had turned out the light, and saw her own reflection in the mirror."

"But he never——" The countess caught herself.

Cobb Kindall nodded. "That might be the effect."

"That is the effect," said Robin. "I talked to the doctor. Several of the poisoned women discovered their trouble in that way."

"If you knew that," Cobb snapped, "why in the world——"

"I never connected Haskall's blue woman with radium poisoning," said Robin. "How could I? It never occurred to me that one of the poisoned women——"

The countess started to slide away. Keith gripped her arm.

"A moment!" he said grimly. "We can settle this quite easily. Mr. Kindall, would you mind turning off the lights?"

"No!" the countess cried. "Don't—please don't! I'm afraid of darkness. Don't believe this man! He's insane!"

"Why are you afraid of darkness?" Keith asked. "Because your body can be seen glowing, then? . . . Another way of proving what I say is to remove that wig which somehow doesn't go with your face, Countess!"

Keith snatched off the wig. Beneath it was a shock of sheared black hair. The woman's eyes went wide with terror.

"Mrs. Meusel," Keith said, "you believed your husband for a while when he told you you were not going to die. But that night when you saw your body glowing in the darkness, you knew the truth. Brooding over your condition, you finally decided to make someone pay for your suffering. You killed Justin, Rex and Sarah Kindall. Am I right?"

"Yes," she quavered; then, turning brimming eyes on Cobb, she said in a choked voice: "Forgive me, Mr. Kindall!"

Suddenly her mood changed. She whirled on Keith—a small storm of fury. Her sharp nails raked his face, drawing blood. In the movement to protect his eyes, his grip on her arm loosened. She jerked away, flying down the hall.

"You'll never——" she cried.

Her words were lost as the door slammed. Moving like a winged thing, Keith's body struck the door just a split-second after the lock clicked.

He heard a drawer open, slam closed. Then the silence was punctuated by a staccato crack. Something thumped heavily on the floor.

Keith flung himself against the door.

It crashed inward. He was too late—and for that reason he felt a surge of relief.

On the floor in the darkness was a small, crumpled figure in a disarranged negligee. The figure gleamed with a faint bluish radiance. In one hand was still clutched a smoking gun. Below her left

breast, the luminous blue was broken in one spot by a widening splotch of crimson.

Robin said softly, "She was too beautiful to die."

"And too dangerous to live," said Keith.