

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

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*An Amazing Novelette
Filled With Weird Happenings*

The **BODYMASTER**

By **Harold Ward**

Foreword

PERHAPS I have been suffering from an hallucination. Possibly during the weary months that I was lost to family and friends I was wandering about the country, my brain in the ferment which afterward developed into the attack of brain fever from which I have just recovered.

Yet the maggots of madness inside my skull could not have created all that I have seen. The proof of my sincerity lies in the fact that within these pages I have confessed complicity in crimes for which the law can hang me if it so desires. I am willing to admit that to the man of science my tale bristles with errors—errors of interpretation, but not of fact—for I am a detective, not a scientist.

*Did such a man as *The Bodymaster* really exist? Or was it only the writhing of my tortured imagination which transformed Doctor Darius Lessman, theologian and philanthropist, into a fiend incarnate? His lair is gone. A pile of charred ruins now occupies the place where it stood. Its inmates died with it. *The Bodymaster* is no more. But is he really dead?*

Time alone will tell. The records of the police department of the City of New York will bear out my story up to a certain point. From there on the affair is a puzzle to me. It is from this that the reader must draw his own deductions. I can give only the facts.

CHAPTER I.

THROUGH the thick tangle of underbrush and trees, which surrounded Doctor Darius Lessman's private sanitarium just outside the city of New York, dashed a young man, coatless, hatless, his shirt and trousers torn to shreds by the thorns and brambles.

With blood streaming from a hundred scratches on his face and hands, he presented a savage, almost inhuman, aspect as he leaped before the automobile rapidly coming down the smooth asphalt pavement.

His face was drawn, haggard, contorted; and the snow-white hair, which crowned his youthful face, was matted and unkempt. His eyes

bulged from their sockets like those of a maniac as he glared at the oncoming machine.

The afternoon, which was just drawing to a close, had been unusually hot: the storm, hovering over the countryside, filled the air with a strange foreboding—an unusual degree of sultriness. The sky was dull save when an occasional flash of lightning tore through the lowering heavens. Not a breath of wind. Not the rustle of a leaf. Yet the teeth of the man in the roadway rattled like castanets, and upon his clammy brow the cold sweat of terror stood out in beads.

The driver of the big machine brought it to a stop with a sharp grinding of brakes. As he caught a glimpse of the ghastly face of the man before him he involuntarily hunched his body back further into his seat.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed.

The other leaped to the side of the machine and fumbled clumsily—his fingers shaking like those of a man with the palsy—at the catch of the door.

"Quick!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "He—the Bodymaster—is after me! Get me to the police station. I must—Oh, my God! I must tell my story before he seizes me again!"

He managed to open the door and stumble into the machine. The driver turned to him.

"All right, old man," he said in the soothing tone that one uses in addressing a lunatic. "We'll get you there in a jiffy. Are you from the big house up yonder?" He jerked his thumb in the direction of the sanitarium.

An involuntary shudder ran through the young man. His eyes dilated. He shrank away from the motorist.

"My God! Not there! Not there again!" he implored. "Please don't take me back to that den! You think

that I'm a madman. I can see that you do. I'm sane—as sane as you. But heavens knows why—after the hell I've been through!"

He turned to the driver and grasped him by the arm.

"Give her the gas!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see that I'm doomed? But no. You know nothing of the Bodymaster and the strange hold he has over his subjects. He is after me—he, the Bodymaster! It is to save others from the same fate that I must tell what I know!"

With a sudden bound he leaped forward, his eyes wild, his hair in a tousled mass, his hands stretched out, the fingers clawing wildly, his whole body quivering. Then he dropped to the floor of the machine as if hurled by unseen hands.

"He is here! *The Bodymaster is here!*" he shrieked. "Drive—for the love of God, dr——"

The words ended in a dull, throaty gurgle as he writhed upon the floor of the machine at the other's feet. The driver, bewildered by the strange scene, threw in the clutch, and the machine dashed madly down the pavement.

The young man was on his back now, his knees drawn up, his face ghastly and twisted, his eyes bulging, his fingers clawing as if unseen hands were gripping at his throat. His mouth was open—gaping as he fought for breath.

With a wild yell of terror, the driver leaped from the machine. The automobile swerved, skidded—then hurled its weight against a nearby tree.

Summoning his courage, he rose to his feet from the side of the road, where his fall had thrown him among the brush and brambles, and approached the wreck.

In the bottom of the car the stranger lay dead!

And upon his white throat were the black marks of fingers!

CHAPTER II.

JOHN DUNCAN was arrested, charged with the murder of the unknown young man.

He had no defense. The evidence was all against him. The body of the stranger had been found in his damaged car. Death was the result of strangulation. The marks of fingers were upon the dead man's throat.

The defendant admitted that the deceased had been alive when he entered the machine. And the story he told was so strange, so unbelievable, that even his own attorney scoffed at it. How, then, could a judge believe his tale?

Doctor Darius Lessman was called upon to testify at the preliminary hearing. Tall, gaunt, saturnine, his raven hair, slightly tinged with gray, brushed back from his high forehead, he looked the student, the man of research, and as such he impressed the jury.

Carefully, painstakingly, he made an examination of the body. To the best of his knowledge and belief, he testified, he had never seen the man in life. How he chanced to be wandering about the grounds of the Lessman sanitarium he did not know. He added to the already favorable opinion formed of him by the judge and jury by asking that he be allowed to pay the funeral expenses of the ragged stranger.

One man alone believed the tale told by John Duncan. He was Patrick Casey, captain in command of the homicide squad of the Metropolitan Police Department.

The alleged murder had happened outside of Casey's jurisdiction; but the captain chanced to be present at the hearing. Immediately afterward he sought an interview with the defendant.

For a second time he heard the story, questioned Duncan closely and, at the close of his visit, advised the accused to retain the private inquiry

agency of which I am the head. He even interested himself to the extent of calling me up, telling me of what he had done and asking that I take the case as a personal favor to him.

John Duncan, being a wealthy man, accepted the policeman's advice. And thus I became a figure in what I am forced to believe was the strangest series of happenings that ever fell to mortal man.

I admit that I am ashamed of the part fate forced me to play. The reader will probably term me either a fool or a lunatic. I am certain that I am not a fool. As for being a lunatic—as I have stated in my foreword, I do not know. But I digress.

Three days later, armed with letters of introduction from some of the most celebrated alienists in the city, all vouching for my character and ability, I applied to Doctor Darius Lessman for a position as attendant.

I secured the position.

AN uncanny, eerie, ghost-like place, this sanitarium of Doctor Lessman's.

My first glimpse of it recalled to mind a description I had read somewhere of a ruined castle "from whose tall black windows came no ray of light and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky. It had been built—some half century before—for a madhouse. Its owner, a better physician than a business man, had lost his all before its completion, and it had fallen badly into decay when Lessman purchased it.

It stood in the midst of an arid thicket of oaks, cedars and stunted pines. Lessman, evidently, had done little to improve the place or its surroundings save to finish that part that had been left uncompleted by the former owner, and year after year it had grown more gloomy and less habitable. The state highway ran a scant half mile away, crowded on both sides by the stunted forest. a

macadamised driveway which wound about through the trees, leading to the house. The nearest habitation was several miles away.

How such a place could be approved by the state as a hospital for the cure of nervous disorders has always been a question to me. Yet investigation proved that Lessman had a state license, although to the best of my knowledge his institution had no patients, nor did it seek them. It was a sanitarium in name only.

In my character of a man seeking employment, I thought it best to walk the last lap of the journey. Dismissing my chauffeur at the edge of the forest, lest some one from the house discover my means of transportation, I sent him home and trudged down the pathway toward the ancient pile.

I must digress long enough to state that this was the last time I was seen until I made my reappearance months afterward, to all appearances a raving maniac. Naturally, after several weeks had passed and nothing was heard from me, my family and friends commenced an investigation. Doctor Lessman was able to prove to them that I had never reached his place, in spite of the statement made by Hopkins, the chauffeur. The latter was arrested and would probably have been held for my murder had it not been for my timely reappearance. But more of this later.

I approached the great door, studied with iron nails and set in a doorway of massive brick and stone. There was no sign of a bell, and I was finally forced to resort to my knuckles to hammer a tattoo on the weather-beaten panel.

I had almost decided to try the door in the rear, when I heard the approach of a heavy step. There came a sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts. Then

a key was turned with a grating noise, and the big door swung back.

Something told me to flee; but I shook off the feeling as unworthy a man of my profession and stood my ground. Had I but obeyed that impulse I would have been a happier man today!

Doctor Lessman, clad in a faded bathrobe, his forefinger between the pages of the volume he had been reading, greeted me. For an instant his gaze traveled over me from head to foot, then went past me as if seeking my means of approach. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he took my letters of introduction and read them carefully, questioning me on several points.

With a gesture of his slender hand he invited me to enter—*the lair of the Bodymaster!*

CHAPTER III.

WHAT better proof that I was not insane during those horrible months than that during my rational periods I kept a diary? Fragmentary though it is, showing as it does the awful strain under which I was placed, the detective instinct must have been uppermost at all times.

I remember nothing of writing it. Yet here it is in my own handwriting. Evidently so deeply impressed upon my subconscious mind must have been my mission—the fact that I was there to save an innocent man from the gallows—that, like a man in his sleep, I wrote, not knowing that I did, obsessed with the one idea—to preserve the evidence which I was accumulating against Darius Lessman. Why he did not destroy the diary I do not know. Possibly I had it too well hidden. Or he may not have thought it worth while, believing that I would never escape.

THE DIARY.

“THE ragged stranger was right. Lessman is a Bodymaster. Already he holds me in his power. My

body is his to do with as he wills. Those into whose hands this writing may fall will probably think me demented, for the human mind declines to believe that which it can not understand. And while I am under his uncanny power I may do some act—commit some deed—which, under happier circumstances, would fill me with loathing. Do not judge me too harshly. Remember that Lessman's is the will which forces me."

ANOTHER ENTRY IN THE DIARY.

"**L**AST night I killed a man. Of this I am almost certain. I, a man sworn to avenge crime and to track down criminals, have the brand of Cain upon my brow. My hands are dripping with blood. I should be in a cell in murderers' row, waiting for an avenging law to hang me, instead of breathing the air of freedom. But am I free? No! A thousand times no! I am as much a prisoner as I would be behind the bars of a felon's cage.

"As one watches a motion picture thrown upon the silver screen, I see myself with Meta by my side We cross a darkened thoroughfare The details are fragmentary—occasional. I know that we are near a house. A window is open. We enter. At her command, I approach the safe placed in the wall. It seems to open to my touch Meta is holding a flashlight—And yet it is not Meta! It is another—a girl, fair-haired, sweet of face—yet her will is the will of Meta. Meta's is the driving force behind her actions, just as my body is driven onward by the iron will of the Bodymaster

"Some one is approaching. We step behind the curtain. He enters and snaps on the light. At sight of the open safe, he turns. He is about to give the alarm There is a knife in my hand. . . . I strike! God in Heaven! *I have killed him!*

. . . . We seize the jewels from the safe and escape. . . .

"There was the stain of blood on my hand when I awoke this morning. I am a murderer! Oh God! I pray that it was all a dream. Yet it was so realistic that I am forced to believe that it is true.

"I have discovered the evidence which I set out to find. But what a terrific price I have paid for what I have learned. Under his will, my brain is a vacuum, rattling around within its pan like a pebble in a tin bucket, functioning only when he so commands. But wait! This can not be entirely so. I must still have some reasoning power left, else I would not be writing these lines. Thank God for that!

"Yet even as I write I know that The Bodymaster is planning my death. He has it within his power to drive my soul from out my body—to usurp this tenement of clay with his own polluted brain. How he works his wonders I will describe later if I am able. It is hard for me to think consecutively.

"Lessman's is the greatest brain, his the most wonderful intellect, the world has ever known. His is the accumulated wisdom of the centuries—since Jesus of Nazareth trod this earth there has been none who could accomplish the wonders he has performed. Think what a power for good he might have been!

"I must publish his devilishness to the world. John Duncan lies festering in a felon's cell, perhaps to stretch a hempen rope for a crime that Lessman committed. I must save him if I can. Yet who will believe me? Wise judges and learned counsel scoffed and jeered at what Duncan had to tell. What, then, will they say when they read these lines? I see them smile derisively and tap their bulging brows in token of my madness.

“Meta is the lure he used to hold me in his power. My instinct told me to flee the minute I crossed the threshold. Would to heaven I had! Lessman must have read my thoughts, for he pressed the bell which summoned her to his side.

“One glimpse of Meta Vinetta and I was lost.

“Lessman introduced me to her as his sister. I know now that she is more to him than that—that she is his soul mate, his affinity. She is his accomplice in all the devilish schemes which incubate within his wondrous brain.

“Together they can rule the world. Lessman holds that the body is a shell, a house built only to hold the soul, deriving its power from the spirit, the will. To him there is no crime in murder, for his theology holds that the snapping of the thread of life is merely the release of the soul which soars away to realms on high. His is the belief that might is right. He needs the bodies of his victims in order to practice his devilish arts. He has the power to take them, and he uses it to the utmost. He holds that the body is not a prison house, but a slave to will. In his philosophy, it is simply a useful tool over which the spirit possesses absolute control. He is neither a spiritualist nor a theosophist. His is a theory all by itself and of itself.

“*Lessman has elected to live forever!* Of that I am certain. He and Meta—the woman he loves.”

ANOTHER ENTRY.

“**T**HERE are other poor dupes here—at least a dozen of them. Some of them are maniacs; and Lessman is holding them, I think, with the hope that he can cure their awful malady. For, as I understand it, he has no power over a diseased brain. It is only those that are normal that bow to his bidding.

“We have compared notes. Collins, of Chicago, has rational streaks during which he is able to talk freely. He, like myself, was a detective. I remember reading of his strange disappearance over a year ago. He was on a robbery case, and certain clues led him to New York. Instead of reporting to the police, he thought to take all the credit and capture the criminals himself. He trailed them to Doctor Lessman’s place. He, like myself, fell a victim to the wiles of Meta. Now he is at intervals a jibbering idiot.

“Several of the poor devils, Collins tells me, were placed here by distant relatives. Lessman, wearing the garb of sanctity, talks of his desire to cure them of their nervous disorder, and their relatives, poor fools, glad to rid themselves of the millstones around their necks, turn the wretched creatures over to him. He charges a low rate for their board and medical treatment.

“To one and all he is known as ‘The Bodymaster.’ He teaches them to call him that. They fear him like the very devil. They talk occasionally of a revolt. But when he is near they tremble at his frown. His hold over them is absolute—complete.”

CHAPTER IV.

*E*VIDENTLY several weeks elapsed between the last entry in the diary and what follows. This is to be inferred from the fact that several things are mentioned as having happened of which there is no record. In all probability, I was in a semi-somnambulic state during the interval, as a result of Lessman’s strange power over me. During my entire incarceration there were times when everything was a blank; at other times, I remember, there were dim, hazy vistas of things into which I peered. They seem like dreams. Yet, if

they were dreams, of what was their substance? A dream must have some foundation.

FROM THE DIARY.

THE unforeseen has come to pass. That which I have just witnessed God never intended that mortal eyes should see. At the very thought of it my body trembles and every nerve tingles as if from electric shock.

"Where is Lessman? Did the Bodymaster and his female accomplice perish in the ruins of their own diabolical art? I hope so. It is better that I—that all of us—die of starvation, locked as we are in this horrible den, than that others should share the fate which has been meted out to us.

"Last night I am almost certain that we exchanged bodies—the Bodymaster and I!"

"At least, my waking consciousness tells me that we did. Yet it is all so hazy that I can remember only fragments of what happened. Perhaps I only dreamed. I tell only what I can remember.

"At his command, I slunk from my narrow cell like a mangy, half-starved, dope-filled circus lion from its cage. And, like the king of beasts, beaten into servitude in the arena, I fawned at my master's feet, ready to do his bidding. Such is the state that I have reached. For my body is not my own. It is his—his to do with as he wills. Fight as I may, an unseen force compels me to do his bidding.

"They were together, he and Meta. From another door entered a girl—young, beautiful, fair-haired. She is, I am certain, the woman who accompanied me on that other occasion of which I have a recollection—the night I found the blood upon my hand and knew that I had killed a man. I dream of her nightly. She is Meta's dupe. Like me, her mind

is not yet a blank. She entered slowly, reluctantly, as if every fiber in her body rebelled against the awful crime in which she was to take a part, her great blue eyes staring straight ahead.

"Like a woman who walks in her sleep, she approached Meta's side. For an instant they stood there—the fair-haired girl and the beautiful, raven-tressed woman. Lessman's hands hovered over them.

"She screamed! God in heaven, how she shrieked! Then the body of Meta staggered to a nearby chair and dropped into its recesses.

"And from the throat of the fair-haired girl with the angel's face came the voice of Meta!"

"It is done!"

"He, the Bodymaster, turned to me. My whole being fought within me against the sacrilege which was being committed. As well attempt to stem the oncoming tide. I felt my body in a convulsion. Something seemed to be tearing at my very vitals: My mind reeled. My brain was filled with fire. The face—the devilish, diabolical, mocking face of the Bodymaster appeared before me. I could see nothing else. His baleful, gleaming eyes seemed to burn into my very core. My body seemed to be hurled through space. . . . Then came oblivion.

"I must have been unconscious but an instant. I stood leaning against the table, my fingers pressed against my aching brow. Dazed, I passed my hand across my face. I was bearded. *It was the face of Lessman, the Bodymaster!*

"The clothes were his. I was inhabiting his body!"

"My startled gaze turned across the room. To all intents and purposes it was I who stood there, my arm about the waist of the golden-haired girl.

"I knew that it was not I—that it was Lessman, the Bodymaster, who offered his foul caresses to the beau-

tiful face upraised to his. I knew that the rich red lips were not those of the girl whose slender body he had defiled. It was Meta—Meta and Lessman, not the girl and I. . . .

“A burst of rage swelled up within me. Something snapped. For an instant a flood of red appeared before my eyes. I leaped forward, the lust for killing within my brain.

“Lessman’s body is fat with nourishment, his muscles fed by good living, while mine is half famished, ill-nourished, weak as a result of worry and nerve strain.

“It was my own body I was punishing. Yet Lessman’s was the soul that inhabited it. As a man sees his face in a mirror, so did I see my face before me. I hurled my stolen body to the floor. Screaming with rage, I showered blow after blow upon it. It writhed with pain.

“And all the time, within me, there was being waged a terrible struggle for mastery. I felt the will of Lessman commanding me to desist. Yet the love of a woman was stronger than his power. I gouged at the gleaming eyes which stared up into mine, the while I choked at the throat—*my throat*—which lay beneath my fingers.

“The woman was screaming. I knew that it was Meta who was cursing me, who sought to pull me from my victim. Yet it was the body of the unnamed girl I loved, her face contorted into a frenzy of malignancy, who showered blow after blow upon my bared head. . . .

“I awoke to find myself here in my cell again. My head aches. My face is covered with bruises. My hair is matted with blood. Lessman must have conquered. I wonder how fared the girl with the mass of shimmering, golden hair. Surely, with all these bruises, it could not have been a dream.”

CHAPTER V.

MORE FROM THE DIARY.

“**S**HE loves me! We met today for the first time, unfettered by the insidious chains the Bodymaster has woven about us. Her name is Avis—Avis Rohmer. She has told me all “Perhaps it is a part of his diabolical plan to allow us to see each other. He knows that I will never seek to escape until I can take her with me. Since my rebellion of the other night—I know not how long ago it was, for time is as nothing in a brain that is partly dead—he has been more careful.

“She, Avis and I, alone of all those who have fallen under his supernatural power, still retain our minds. The others are mental wrecks, their skulls mere empty shells in which their addled brains sizzle and froth like half-worked wine in kegs. She has begged me to protect her. And I have sworn to take her from this den of iniquity, although God alone knows how I can ever keep my promise. For I am completely under his power as she.

“Victory makes him careless, while failure makes him redouble his efforts. That is why this narrative appears piecemeal. I am like a man sleeping the sleep of the exhausted, waking up occasionally for food, then dropping off again. What he is doing during the intervals when I am not myself I can only imagine.”

ANOTHER ENTRY.

“**I** MUST work fast if I am to save Avis. I care not for myself now—since I have felt love. She is an orphan. She came here from a western state, determined to make her fortune on the stage. Like thousands of others, she found that her talent was mediocre. She sought to make a living in other ways when she found that all that was open to her was the downward path. Meta—again it was Meta who served as the lure—read

her advertisement. Meta appeared before her as the Good Samaritan—a woman, wealthy, refined, seeking a companion. She brought her here.

“Lessman allows me to see her every day now. What devilish plan has he in view that he should torture me with her sufferings?”

CHAPTER VI.

OCCASIONALLY through the clouds of obscurity there appears some incident which I remember distinctly. Strange as it may appear, there is no record of these occasions in my diary. I can explain this only by the supposition that at such times Lessman withdrew his power over me, while on all other occasions I was, as I have said before, in a semi-somnambule state.

THE DIARY CONTINUES.

I AWOKE as one awakens from a horrible nightmare. My brain was as clear as a crystal. For an instant I imagined that I was in my own apartment—that the suffering I had gone through were but the conjurings of my own mind.

“A single glance at the barred window brought me back to a sudden realization of my condition. But my mind was my own. I was freed from the horrible thing that had obsessed me.

“On the table in one corner of the room was food. I ate ravenously. I do not remember how long it had been since I had eaten. My meal completed, I looked about me for some means of escape. Once I could find a way out of the accursed place—some weapon with which to defend myself—I would return, free Avis and flee.

“It must have been midnight. Outside, the rain was falling in torrents. It beat a regular tattoo upon the window. Cautiously, lest I be heard, I tiptoed to the door and tried the knob.

“The door was unlocked!

“In an exultation of excitement, I peered out. There was no one in sight. My mood was detached, strange, vague—marked by an indescribable something I could not explain. Save for the single kerosene lamp, which burned low in its bracket at the end of the long hallway, the place was in darkness.

“Removing my shoes, I tiptoed my way across the floor. Avis’ room was the fourth door from mine. That much she had told me. Reaching it, I tried the knob. It was locked. I tapped softly against the panel. Receiving no answer, I rapped more loudly. I dared not raise my voice. Failing to arouse her, I was forced to leave her for a moment to continue my exploration.

“In one corner of the hallway stood a huge stick—evidently a cane that had been carried by one of the keepers in the days when the place was used as an asylum for maniacs. With this in my hand, I felt more secure.

“Where was Lessman? Had he made his escape while I slept, leaving my door open? Had he forced Avis and the other poor creatures who were under his command to accompany him? The thought startled me. Grasping the cudgel more firmly, I took the lamp from its bracket and started on a tour of investigation. All of the doors opening into the hallway, with the exception of my own, were locked. The silence was tomblike, uncanny.

“At the end of the long corridor a pair of stairs wound upward. Mounting them, I found myself in a long passage similar to that which I had just quitted. One or two of the rooms near the end were open. There was nothing in them except old furniture, moth-eaten and dusty with age. The entire floor seemed deserted.

“Continuing onward, I came to a door which, though it seemed to be

locked, seemed to give a little under the pressure of my knee. Setting my lamp upon the floor, I put my shoulder against it and gave a long, steady shove. Under this force it opened quite readily.

"My stockinged feet made no noise, while the ease with which I was able to force the door showed that the hinges had been recently oiled. Inside, a lamp was burning.

"I hesitated in the doorway. Then my startled gaze made out a second room, partitioned from the first by curtains, pushed partly back.

"Across my field of vision moved the gaunt figure of The Bodymaster. He was clad in the faded bathrobe in which I had first seen him, and he held a lamp in his hand. The light shone upon his thin, cruel face. He approached the side of the bed and stood gazing down upon its occupant.

"Something seemed to draw me closer. Upon the bed lay a corpse—a blond-haired giant—stripped to the waist. As Lessman, his evil gaze still upon the mammoth figure, held the lamp a trifle aloft, *the dead man writhed and twisted as if in mortal agony!*

"The Bodymaster stretched forth one thin hand. The man upon the bed stiffened—then sat bolt upright, his bloodshot eyes glaring!

"Involuntarily I took a step backward.

"*As God is my judge, the eyes were those of a corpse—glassy, unseeing!* And while I still looked, the body slipped backward, the curious writhing movements ceased, and that which lay upon the bed was only insensate clay.

"Now or never was the time to strike. Grasping my cudgel more firmly, I raised it over my head. The back of the Bodymaster was turned toward me. I had him off his guard. I was about to bring the club down across his head when, without turning his gaze, he spoke:

"'Sit down, my friend, and throw your cane aside. You can not strike. Your arm is palsied.'

"The cane dropped from my fingers. I attempted to lower my arm to recover it. Impossible. I was unable to move. My arm was held aloft as by an unseen hand.

"The Bodymaster turned toward me with a smile.

"'Sit down!' he commanded.

"My arm dropped to my side. Like a drunken man I staggered to a chair."

CHAPTER VII.

"SEATING himself opposite me. Lessman pushed a box of cigars across the table.

"'Help yourself,' he smiled, selecting one for himself. 'You are some sixty seconds ahead of time. I hardly expected you to be so prompt.'

"'Expected me!' I ejaculated.

"He nodded. 'Naturally,' he responded. 'How else do you suppose you got here? You certainly did not expect that I would make so great an oversight as to leave your door unlocked? I wanted you—wanted to have a talk with you. My mind willed that you should come, and you are here.'

"He waved his hand with a slight gesture as if dismissing the entire subject. For a second there was silence. Then he resumed:

"'Our little fracas of the other night taught me that you are a man of more than ordinary mental ability; in fact, you are the first who has ever disobeyed my unspoken commands. And, more than that, you showed me that you are the man I have been seeking all these years.'

"His eyes burned with enthusiasm as he continued.

"'Man,' he went on, 'my experiments have been a success. True, lives have been destroyed. But what is life? Your man-made theology teaches you that life is but a span of a few years in eternity; you snap the

cord which binds you to this earth, and immediately you enter the paradise which your God has prepared for you. Why, then, prolong matters? I, rather than being the monster you think me to be, am a benefactor to the human race. Every man who dies in my hands before his allotted time has that much longer to spend in heaven.'

"He leaned back in his chair and laughed mirthlessly for an instant.

"'I am not here to argue the right or wrong of the thing, however,' he continued. 'I am a man born to rule; I would rather be a big devil in hell than a little angel in heaven—if there be such places as heaven and hell, which I greatly doubt.

"'I need help in my work—my experiments. True, I have Meta—but she is only a weak woman. I need others—men whom I can teach—men whom I can trust—men with the will to conquer. You have proved to me that you are such a man. The world is yours—the world and all that it contains—if you accept.'

"He stopped suddenly and gazed into my eyes as if trying to read my very soul. In fact, I believe that he did read my mind, for he answered my unspoken thoughts before I had voiced them:

"'Yes, the devil took Christ upon the mountain and offered him everything,' he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. 'Call me the devil if you like—I care not a rap what you term me—I offer you the same. I said before, and I say again, the world is yours—money, power, pleasure and——'

"As he spoke, as if in obedience to some rehearsed cue, the door opened. A vague perfume assailed my nostrils—a faint, elusive scent—a zephyr from the East. Through the opening Meta stepped. She wore a kimono—a soft, silken, figured affair reminiscent of the Orient. I can only remember that beneath its folds protruded a glimpse of tiny, bare feet clad in the smallest of sandals.

"There are silences more eloquent than words. For an instant my eyes sought hers—deep, dark, lustrous, glowing like great pools of liquid fire.

"She smiled. Then, suddenly, she sprang forward, her arms from which the folds of the kimono had slipped, bared—outstretched toward me, her rich red lips upraised to mine.

"I leaped to my feet. My mind was filled with wild, insane thoughts. I took a half step toward her. Like a frightened bird, she darted backward. Then, as if filled with a wild abandon, she tore open the neck of her kimono, revealing to my startled gaze a glimpse of transparent white skin.

"Stretching forth one rounded arm, she displaced the curtain, discovering to my view a room opposite that in which lay the body of the man from the grave.

"My God! Crouched in a corner like a frightened animal was Avis! Her dress was torn, her golden hair matted and unkempt. She shrunk away from the light as one who fears its rays. Her big blue eyes gazed into mine. They were wide with fear. Yet her lips moved. It seemed to me that they were trying to form some message—to convey something to me.

"She held up her hands appealingly. They were fastened together with chains.

"From behind me came the voice of Lessman:

"'Choose!' he commanded. 'On one hand wealth, luxury, power, beautiful women; on the other—*this!*

"'Choose!'"

ANOTHER EXTRACT FROM THE DIARY.

"I AWOKE in my own bed. I have the word of Avis for what happened. She says that when Lessman made his terrible offer to me that I stood for an instant like a man too astounded for utterance. Suddenly I turned and struck him squarely in

the face. Meta screamed. Lessman, however, merely dropped back a step and stretched forth his hand. I had my arm drawn back to strike him again. I wavered, staggered for a second like a drunken man, then my knees gave way under me and I fell forward on my face.

"That is all she knows. She was hurried back to her own room by Meta, where she fell in a swoon."

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN suffering from amnesia has, upon his return to normal, no recollection of what happened while he was in that condition. While I do not say that I was amnesic in every sense of the word, yet my condition must have resembled that peculiar malady to a certain degree. I can positively state that I have absolutely no remembrance of the events which are described below. Yet they are in my own handwriting in my diary. My own idea of the subject is that I was in a sort of twilight sleep, as it were—not completely under Lessman's influence, yet partly so. I give the contents of my diary just as they were written, venturing the assertion, however, that they must have been put down several days after the events of the previous chapter:

"A strange thing has come to pass. The Bodymaster evidently bears me no ill will. For last night Avis and I dined with him. Ordinarily, we are fed like animals, the food served out to us by a deaf and dumb mulatto who shoves the edibles through the bars to those who are too dangerous to be allowed outside their cells. While such of us as Lessman evidently considers harmless are occasionally permitted to dine at a long, bare table in the hallway. Here we sit and wolf our food like swine, our only thought being to fill our bellies quickly. lest

the others get more than their share of the meal.

"Imagine, then, my surprise last night when, an hour before time for eating the mulatto brought to my room—for I am not yet confined to a cell, probably because I am not yet stark mad—a dress suit. Everything was there—even down to the studs. With it was a shaving outfit. Laying the things carefully upon my cot, he handed me a note. It read:

"Let us forget our troubles for tonight. Dine with me. I have a surprise in store for you."
"Lessman".

"I was shaved and cleaned and feeling like a new man by the time the dumb servant called for me. Following him down the stairs, I was ushered into the large parlor. Lessman, in full dress, seized me by the hand and greeted me warmly, while an instant later Meta, looking truly regal in an elaborate decollete, stood before me. But the real surprise came a minute later.

"Avis was ushered in!

"Attired in some fancy gown—what man can describe a woman's dress?—she looked like an angel from heaven. I pinched myself to see whether I was awake or dreaming. What object had the Bodymaster in this masquerade?

"How can I describe the dinner which followed? For weeks we had been on a diet of little more than bread and soup. And now we sat down to a feast. Lessman was the perfect host; Meta the perfect hostess. Under their deft manipulations we forgot ourselves—forgot that they were monsters—remembered only that we were honored guests. Never have I met as charming a conversationalist as he. The man is a veritable storehouse of knowledge, with the added ability of imparting it to others. He has been everywhere, seen everything.

"He is far too subtle for me, for I have fallen a victim to his insidious wiles. Yet it is for another that I have sold myself, body and soul, to this monster.

"He knows that I love Avis. My every look shows it. And he is wise enough to seize the golden opportunity. That is the reason for all these courtesies, the dinner, the clothes, the brilliant conversation.

"Meta and Avis left the room, leaving Lessman and myself to our cigars. For weeks I have been without the solace of nicotine. Under the soothing influence of the weed and the charm of his conversation, I settled back in my chair, at peace with all the world. Lessman sensed my mood. He turned to me, his black eyes dancing with energy.

"'You are the first who has ever been able to combat my power,' he said slowly. 'And instead of being angered, I think the more of you for it. I need you—need you badly. Without a man of your caliber my work—my experiments—must temporarily halt.

"'You love the golden-haired girl in yonder—and if I am not greatly mistaken, she loves you. She is yours—yours if you agree to my demands. Otherwise——'

"At a gesture the door opened. Into the room came the mulatto dragging a woman—a mere slip of a girl. In her eyes shone the light of insanity. Her hair was matted, her clothes in tatters and covered with vermin. Her talonlike fingers worked spasmodically as she babbled meaninglessly. I shrank back from her in horror.

"The Bodymaster stepped across the room and with a sweeping movement of his hand, drew back the curtain. In the further corner of the adjoining room sat Avis—a veritable queen among women, in conversation with Meta. He withdrew his hand and the curtain fell again. He stepped back to his chair and reseated

himself. The mute withdrew, dragging the poor insane creature with him.

"For a moment there was silence. Then Lessman turned to me again.

"'Within a fortnight,' he said, 'she—the girl in yonder—the girl you love—will be like *that!* I know the symptoms. Her mind is on the verge. It is for you to say whether she goes over the abyss.

"'Obey my commands, give me the assistance I demand, and the girl you love stays as she is now—the companion of Meta. Luxury, clothes, good food—everything that a woman cares for—will be hers. Refuse, and she goes back to her cell—to the squalor and dirt and vermin from which came the poor wretch you have just seen.

"'You and you alone can save her!'

"He stopped dramatically. There was but one answer. May God in Heaven have mercy on my soul! I have become Lessman's partner in crime—an accomplice of that foul thing, the Bodymaster—I who have sworn to bring him to justice!

"But I have saved Avis."

'CHAPTER IX.

I JUDGE that several weeks must have elapsed between the time the foregoing was written and what follows:

"What does mankind know about psychic phenomena? I remember reading the attempts of various novelists to exploit the subject. Combining a smattering of psychology with a vivid imagination, they succeed in knocking together a readable, though unreliable, story, trusting to the general lack of knowledge to cover their untruthfulness. And who can blame them? Secure behind the ramparts of the grave's grim silence, they can defy the world to prove them wrong. Their weird hypotheses bring them gold, power and position in the world

of letters. And I—I, the only man who ever sent his soul hurtling through the realms of space to explore the mysteries of the great unknown—I must keep silent.

“The human mind refuses to believe what it does not understand. Were I to make public what I *know*—even if it were possible—I would be derided, held up to ridicule by press and public. For, despite our vaunted civilization, we are still slaves to superstition and ignorance, ever ready like those of old, to strike down one who dares utter the truth.

“Who among the millions on this globe would believe that I have spent days—weeks—months—in the dim past? As a man looks upon a motion picture of himself thrown upon the screen, so I have seen myself in the ages gone by. In shining armor, a plumed lance in my hand. I have ridden with the crusaders, or fought with the devil-may-care gallantry of the times for the favor of a damsel’s smile. I have been the head of as bloody a gang of cutthroats as ever slit a weasand or scuttled a craft.

“I smile when I think of the things that I have been—I who am now the head of a modern detective agency, hired to run down the man whose gigantic brain has made these things all possible. I have been among the best and the worst of them in days gone by. Yet who would believe such a story? Lessman is too far in advance of his time. Yet there is a possibility that a few centuries hence some eye may read these lines and wonder how the men of today could be so dense.

“I am no longer afraid of death. I know now that such fear is only a superstitious idea. There is no such thing as death. That which we term death is but a step from one life to another. Lessman has taught me that life is a cycle and that when we leave it we enter into another exist-

ence, better or worse than the one we are quitting in accordance with our own actions.

“Lessman! Ah, there is the intellect! It is he who has made it possible for me to view wonders which no man ever looked upon before. I wonder how I could have doubted him.

“Lessman is a scientist—a thinker ahead of his time. Now that he has shown me that there is no death I feel no compunction about taking life, for by taking life we merely assist nature by a few years, leaving the body for us to experiment on. He has promised me that some day he will publish the results of his conclusions in order that the world may know and study. When he does, I will occupy a star part on the pages. For it is I who, at the command of Lessman, have explored the realms unknown, bringing back to him the fruits of my knowledge.

“And I have met Avis again and again. I have found that she has been with me through the ages—my loved one, my affinity. In every period of the past she has accompanied me—just as she will in the future, until the time comes where Divine Intelligence brings all things to an end.

“Let me start at the beginning. No more do I live in a cell-like room, eating like an animal with the cattle whose brain power is not as great as mine. With Avis by my side, I dine in state with Lessman and Meta.

“The next evening, immediately after dinner. The Bodymaster summoned me to his library. He was anxious to commence his experiments. At the beginning I was nervous, keyed up to the highest pitch, regretting the bargain I had made with him. But within five minutes he had wrought a change in my mind, and under the mastery of his words I soon

reached a point where I was as enthusiastic as he.

"Remember, I have dabbled in philosophy to a certain extent myself. I took a degree at Princeton before I took up the business of crime detection. But my knowledge is elementary compared with that of Lessman. But I am getting away from my subject.

"Under the spell of his eloquence, I forgot that I was the servant and he the master—that I was merely a prisoner, subservient to my jailor's will. For an hour we discussed the subject; I was as interested as he. There is, he claims, no heights to which man can not climb, providing he so wills. To him man is—or should be—absolutely the master of his own body and soul.

"His is a mind that has reached on where others stopped. Hypnotism, to him, is child's play. Soul transference, the exchange of bodies—these are the things that this man dabbles with. But he has his limit. He can go so far and no farther.

"However, with my will submissive to his—with my mind attuned to his—he believed that he could send me hurling through space. In other words, he was to be the power station which would furnish me the energy to make the voyages of exploration.

"I was like wet clay in his hands. With the enthusiasm of a youngster, I gave myself over to him. Leaning back in my chair, at his command I made my mind as nearly as possible an absolute vacuum. It was probably but for an instant—but enough. There was none of the pain that I felt before on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when my soul was divorced from my body. Instead, I felt my soul—my mental being—leave my body. I stood beside myself sitting there in the chair. There was no fear—nothing except a feeling of buoyancy. . . ."

CHAPTER X.

I MUST digress from my diary again.

As I have stated elsewhere, I have a recollection of certain things which transpired while I was in Lessman's power, although the greater part of the time that I passed with him is but a blank.

There is nothing in my diary which touches upon my trips into the unknown under his strange influence, aside from an occasional vague mention. I am certain that the greater part of the time I was in a sort of daze, imagining myself in a perfectly normal condition, yet held by The Bodymaster in a state where I would respond immediately to his will.

Yet even now I can recall, vaguely, incidents which happened to me on these trips. I remember meeting Avis on numerous occasions and under many names. Had my adventures happened consecutively, and could I remember them, they would be interesting food for thought for the men of science. But, unfortunately, they jump here and there, the story, oft-times, remaining unfinished.

There are so many, many adventures, the details of which I can not recall, that I will make no attempt to set them down. Suffice to say that all the time my brain was steadily growing weaker while I, poor dupe that I was, imagined that I was again normal.

During my lucid intervals I was constantly troubled by a gnawing conscience. Here was I, an officer of the law, lending myself to the worst form of outlawry. I attempted to reconcile myself with the thought that I was a prisoner, yet I was ever obsessed with the idea that I had proved a traitor to myself and to my oath. My only recompense was the feeling that by becoming a traitor I was saving the life and reason of the woman I loved.

I wonder now why I did not kill Avis and then commit suicide. So

great was Lessman's influence over me that I sincerely believed that death was a myth. My own adventures beyond the pale had proved to me the correctness of his theory. Why, then, I did not end it all is something that can not be explained, especially when one recollects that from my warped viewpoint death would have been the easiest solution of the dilemma. My only explanation is that my mind was not functioning properly. As I have remarked again and again the reader must form his own conclusions, draw his own deductions, for I am dealing in facts, not surmises.

Lessman allowed me the freedom, to a certain extent, of the house. With Avis by my side, I wandered up and down the long, dusty corridors, exploring, searching. I told myself that I was looking for evidence—that sooner or later I would make my escape and bring The Bodymaster to justice. And I found none—nothing but the poor wretches locked in their cells, mad—all of them. And who would believe a maniac? No, there was absolutely nothing that could be used against the monster. It would be my word and that of Avis against that of Lessman and Meta. Such a case as that would be laughed out of court.

Why did I not make my escape? I could not. I only know that with the door wide open an invisible hand seemed to keep me from crossing the threshold.

CHAPTER XI.

AGAIN I must resort to my diary:

"I know now how the stranger was killed—the man for whose death John Duncan is being held. Who the medium was through whom Lessman worked I do not know. I imagine that it was Collins, the Chicago detective. I have questioned him, and he does not remember anything about the affair, so far gone is his mind.

Yet he has a hazy recollection of having at one time done Lessman's bidding. Nor have I learned the name of the poor fellow who met death in the heroic attempt to unmask The Bodymaster.

"The dean of Daggett College is dead—murdered! Another professor has been arrested as the murderer. Lessman showed me the paper this morning, chuckling over the gruesome details. There is absolutely no hope for the poor wretch who has been seized by the police, for the evidence is all against him. They will hang him, and the law will consider itself satisfied. I laughed with Lessman at the newspaper account. Is he not right when he states that both of them are merely being ushered into paradise ahead of their time?

"I am certain that I killed Professor Ormsby!

"Years before he and Professor Jacobs had been teachers in the same college where Lessman held a chair. To them Lessman, then a young man, presented some of his astonishing theories. They turned upon him with ridicule, rebuked him; and then reported him as a heretic to the head of the university. It was their testimony which caused Lessman's dismissal in disgrace. He swore to get revenge.

"Two nights ago Lessman hurled my ego—my spirit—through space. I am certain of it, although my memory is indistinct and is growing weaker every hour. At his command I went to Ormsby's apartments. Jacobs was seated with his old friend engaged in a heated discussion, for both were argumentative men.

"Before the eyes of Professor Jacobs, Dean Ormsby shrieked as an invisible hand struck him down—then fell writhing to the floor, the purple marks of fingers upon his throat.

"They arrested Jacobs for the murder. Others had heard them arguing. Vainly he tried to tell them the truth

—that the argument had been a friendly one and that his friend had been killed by some unseen force.

“They scoffed at his story—for the marks of fingers showed too plainly upon the dead man’s neck.”

ANOTHER ENTRY IN THE DIARY.

“**I** WONDER if my mind is weakening? I seem to do Lessman’s bidding too easily. I fall in with his every suggestion. I know that he is using me in his crimes—that he is getting rich as a result of my efforts—and I do not seem to recollect what transpires, as I used to. Everything is hazy, with here and there some specially vivid remembrance standing out amidst the chaos.

“Occasionally he reads me the papers, or hands them to me after calling my attention to some mysterious crime of which there is an account. Often he tells me, with a sneer, that he is the author and I the perpetrator of these horrible affairs. Innocent men are being made to suffer for things that I have done.

“The police are on the lookout for a mysterious woman who has been seen often where strange crimes have been committed. Can it be that they—Lessman and Meta—are using Avis as they are using me? They both deny it. And Avis tells me that she has no recollection of such things I wonder.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE REMARKABLE THINGS FROM THE DIARY.

“**T**HEY hanged John Duncan today for the murder of the unknown young man. And I, the man who swore to save him from the gallows, could do nothing.

“I am an accomplice—an accessory after the fact. Lessman is a fiend, and if Meta is any better it is only because she lacks his scientific ability. I am beginning to hate them both.

“I have been tricked. I am but a dupe. My brain is steadily growing weaker. When they have sucked me dry they will cast me aside, as they have Collins and the others. I realize this when I am alone, but when I am with Lessman I do his bidding gladly, happily.

“The papers are often filled with accounts of his work among the poorer classes. They say that he gives thousands of dollars away yearly. Little do they suspect that it is money that he has secured through crime—that he interests himself among the poor only because he occasionally is able to secure some new type of human brain upon whom he can work his nefarious experiments.”

ANOTHER EXTRACT.

“**D**AMN the Bodymaster! I hate him! His hold over me is absolute—supreme.

“Vile as I have become, degraded as he has made me, my very being revolts at the thought of what he has forced me to do. It were better that I were dead—a thousand times better. But I can not even die. For he, curse him, will not let me. He owns my body and my soul.

“Yesterday I am certain that I killed another man. It was Johnston, the broker—a man I knew well in my other days—as kind-hearted an old fellow as ever lived. Many is the favor that he has done for me. Yet, at the dictation of Lessman, I took the poor old fellow’s life.

“God in Heaven! What a mixup it was! Lessman planned it all. He might have made it different—easier for those left behind to bear. But no—that is not his way. He loves the dramatic, the theatrical. But let me tell it just as it happened:

“Together, we went to Johnston’s house—Lessman and I. The poor old fellow has been under the weather for several days, but he has not allowed his illness to interfere with his philan-

thropic work. Lessman, in his guise of a worker among the poor and afflicted, had no trouble in gaining entrance. He introduced me as another laborer in the vineyard. I have changed so much as a result of what I have been through that Johnston failed to recognize me.

"Alone in the room with the old man, Lessman commanded me to do his bidding. I swear that I tried to withhold my hand, but I was powerless. It was not I, but another, who seized the scrawny neck in my muscular fingers and pressed—pressed—pressed against the windpipe until the haggard white face turned black and the gray eyes bulged forth under their shaggy white brows like glass beads.

"He tried to fight back—to defend himself—but what was his puny strength compared to mine? His efforts only incensed me the more. I shook him as a terror roughs a rat. And the agonized expression on his face! It was awful. He tried to shriek for help, but so firm was my hold upon him that he could only splutter and gurgle.

"Lessman watched it all. He chuckled with glee at the feeble old man's weak gasps and urged me to further efforts. Then, when I had laid the old fellow down upon his couch, it was The Bodymaster who, with a tremendous show of hypocrisy, shouted for help and jerked frantically at the bell which summoned family and servants.

"Never shall I forget the look of pathetic grief upon the face of the dead man's aged helpmate. Liar that he is, Lessman told her a story of the old fellow's sudden choking and of his death before we could summon help. The servants carried her swooning from the room."

A FURTHER ENTRY.

"**M**R. JOHNSTON is dying, they say, from grief. Lessman chuckles over it, thinking it a

huge joke. When I am with him, I laugh, too. Away from him, I can see the horror—the devilish horror of it all.

"Lessman is richer by thousands of dollars. Mrs. Johnston, if she lives, will be almost a pauper. The sum of which she was filched represented practically their all—the savings of a lifetime. For Lessman presented a forged will in which almost everything, except a small amount for the widow, was left to charity with Lessman as the administrator."

CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLOWING the above, my diary is filled for several pages with meaningless, childlike scrawls. I seem to have tried to write, but evidently my brain and hand failed to co-ordinate. Here and there I can make out a curse against The Bodymaster, but nothing else can be read. From this I take it that several weeks passed between the time the last entry was written and that which now follows. During that time I was probably in one of my trance-like states, so deeply under Lessman's influence that I had no control over my actions. At the same time the fact that I even attempted to write shows that, deep within my subconscious brain, there was ever that desire to give the horrible truth to the world.

FROM THE DIARY.

"**I** HAVE denied the truth. I have betrayed those in whose pay I am, and now I know the remorse of Judas.

"Can it be that The Bodymaster seeks my Avis? Are those glances which he darts at her from beneath his half-closed lids intended to be messages of love?

"Of late she has appeared distracted and filled with a vague melan-

choly when I am around. Does she wish to tell me something, yet fears to open her lips?

"She knows my cataclysmic temper. She has seen me throw off the baleful influence of The Bodymaster when a wild fit of passion seized me. She probably fears that I will again rise against him and that he will blast me where I stand.

"My hands are tied. In turning myself over to The Bodymaster I have betrayed the woman I love. May Heaven have mercy on my soul!"

ANOTHER ENTRY.

"**I**N PROWLING about the ruins of the old building today I found the remains of an ancient chapel. In one end was an altar, tumbling to ruin. In a little niche, dust covered, was a bottle of Holy Water. I have seized upon it and have hidden it in my room. Perhaps it will save us both.

"I wonder if The Bodymaster has sold himself to the devil? I have heard of such things. No one would believe that such a thing is possible. Yet who would believe that the happenings which I have recorded in my diary could have taken place? They sound like witchcraft, so strange, so diabolical are they. I never believed in such things, but now I am ready to believe anything."

A SUBSEQUENT EXTRACT.

"**M**Y MIND is made up. I talked with Avis again today. She practically admitted that Lessman has been annoying her with his attentions. Who knows to what steps he will go while she is under his devilish influence?

"Meta, too, is showing her teeth at poor Avis. Heretofore she has shielded the innocent girl to a certain extent. Of that I am certain, and Avis also believes it. But of late she has acted strangely, even showing her temper on several occasions. Lessman

treats her at such times with amused contempt. He knows the absolute hold that he has over her.

"But she may injure my loved one. How, I do not know. She is a woman capable of anything. And the 'green-eyed monster' has neither brains nor conscience.

"I am going to be a man at last. I am summoning all of my will power for the battle which is sure to come within a few days. I must—I will—break the bonds which he has placed about me. Just as I arose in rebellion against him on those other occasions, so will I rise against him again for the sake of the woman I love. But this time there will be no surrender. I will conquer him and save her, or die in the attempt.

"To die for Avis may mitigate my sin in the eyes of God.

"I feel The Bodymaster summoning me. . . . My every nerve tingles These may be the last lines I will ever write. . . . I wonder if these pages will ever be read by other eyes than mine? I go now to answer to his call. . . . *God help me. . . .*"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE remainder of my tale is from memory, for the preceding lines are the final entry in my diary. As I have stated elsewhere, I can recall certain things which occasionally happened during my trance-like periods. Remember your dreams—vague, indistinct, hazy—leaping here and there? So are my recollections of that last hour with The Bodymaster. Probably many things happened of which I have no memory. In my desire to stick to facts, I give only that which I remember, leaving the blank places to the reader's imagination.

It must have been immediately after making the final entry in my

diary that Lessman summoned me, for the book was in my pocket when I eventually found myself.

Of this, however, I have no memory. My first recollection is of floating through space on one of those strange exploring expeditions in the Great Beyond on which The Bodymaster so often sent me, several of which are described in my diary. Whether I was just returning, or was on my way, I do not know. I only recall that something seemed to be dragging me back—that my whole thought—if thought I could be said to have had—was to get back to my own body as soon as possible.

My next recollection is of being in the room with Lessman. My body lay back in an easy chair, cold, stark and deathlike. I attempted to enter it. But the will of Lessman held me back.

I could see, I could hear, yet I had no visibility. I was but a wraith—an ego as it were—a thought—a spirit—a vapor!

And I was controlled wholly by the brain of Lessman. Just as the invisible current sent out by a central station causes the tiny submarine miles away to hurl itself here and there, so was his magnetic brain master of my actions.

I knew then—or *felt* rather than knew, for I do not believe that a wraith is able to think—I felt that it was Lessman's will that I should never return to my body shell. Something—it was his thought—seemed to hurl me back into space. And at the same time another—an even stronger thought—seemed to hold me transfixed.

It was the will power that I had concentrated for weeks past, aided by the desire for help from Avis. Her whole being was calling out for me.

She was in the beast's arms. For once in his career his terrible will had no effect upon his victim. Her golden hair was torn from its coils and

lay in a shimmering cloud about her shoulders. Her tiny fists beat a tattoo upon his face; his black, lustful eyes gazed, snakelike, into hers, seeking to charm her with their power.

It was awful! I knew that she was calling me—calling me with every bit of her being. And I was helpless, chained to the floor, unable to regain the cold form which was myself.

Suddenly, she tore herself from his grasp. Her clothing was hanging in shreds; across her cheek was an ugly scratch; upon one white, rounded arm stood a livid red welt where his cruel fingers had seized her. She was screaming madly. The furniture was overturned.

Now he had her cornered. But she fought herself away from him, striking him across the head with the leg of a chair that had been broken in the fray.

He pursued her across the room. . . . Once more she was in his grasp. I could hear her breath come gaspingly as she put every ounce of her strength into a final effort to free herself. . . .

The door opened. Meta entered. Her black eyes were blazing. Her mouth worked convulsively. She was a raging demon—a woman scorned—cast aside for another. Like a devil from hell, she threw herself into the fray. Lessman swept her aside with a single motion of his muscular arm.

For an instant she lay there stunned. . . . She dragged herself to her knees, her lips mouthing curses. . . . She half rose to her feet and staggered toward them as Lessman dragged his shrieking victim toward the door which led to the other room. He turned toward her, his fiery eyes snapping with uncontrolled anger.

For the moment I was forgotten. . . . Something snapped. I found myself again within my own body, the lust for battle raging within me. . . . Lessman, surrounded by his enemies, turned like a stag at bay. . . . I felt the currents of his power-

ful mind surge around me again like great waves beating against a rock-bound coast.

Every bit of energy I possessed was necessary to hold myself together. He caught me within the power of his will! I felt myself slipping—slipping—*slipping!* Everything grew black before me. I could see nothing save his eyes—burning—*burning* into my very soul.

Like a man who is fighting an overdose of chloral, I strove to free myself from the web which his mind was weaving about me. It was of no avail. Again I felt a wave of fire shoot through my veins.

I lurched against the table. Seizing the lamp, with a final effort. I hurled it straight at the face of the mocking demon before me.

I KNEW no more until I awoke in the hospital.

They say that the place Lessman

called his sanitarium was burned to the ground the night before they found me wandering, almost a maniac, several miles away.

As I stated in the beginning, I am unable to distinguish between the truth and the wanderings of my diseased brain. The reader must draw his own conclusions.

What happened? Did I kill Lessman? Did he and Meta and Avis perish in the fire with the other poor unfortunates? Nobody knows.

I HAVE just learned that a woman—a golden-haired woman—was found a week ago in a demented condition in a far distant town. The reports say that she mumbles something about "The Bodymaster!" Can it be Avis? I leave tonight for the hospital where she is confined. If it be she, perhaps my presence will recall her to herself.

THE END.

