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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Consuming Flame

By PAUL ERNST

*The price of a life—ten million dollars! An utterly amazing story about the exploits of the world's weirdest criminal, who calls himself Doctor Satan*

## 1. The Night Explodes

THE service telephone rang. The chauffeur, in whipcord pants and shirt sleeves, picked it up. The crisp voice of Besson, president and majority stockholder of Besson Motors, sounded out.

"Carlisle, is the sedan in running order?"

The chauffeur stared at the phone with bulging eyes. His gasp sounded out. Then he collected his wits, and said: "Of course, sir."

"Bring it around to the side entrance, then," Besson ordered. "Full tank, check everything. I'm going to drive down to Cleveland. I'll drive it myself."

Carlisle kept staring at the phone in that unbelieving way. He opened his lips several times as if to express the amazement showing on his face. But no words came.

"Well? Do you hear me?" snapped Besson.

"Yes, sir," responded the chauffeur. "Certainly, sir. The sedan will be at the side entrance at once, sir."

He hung up, swore in profound perplexity, then shrugged into his whipcord coat and went downstairs to the garage.

He got into the sedan, an immense, gleaming thing built specially in the shops of the Besson Motors Company, and sent it out of the wide doors and down the graveled lane to the portico of the Besson mansion.

He got out of the car and waited respectfully for the master to appear. But while he waited, with a bemused scowl, he felt the car's radiator.

It was quite warm. The car *had* been used recently.

Besson came out of the door, followed by a footman who carried a small bag and a brief-case. Besson was a short man, heavy-set, inclined to rather loud checked suits which would have looked humorous on his squat frame had it not been for the quiet, tremendous power lying obviously in eye and jaw. No one laughed after looking into the motor magnate's face!

"Everything ready?" said Besson.

"Yes, sir," nodded the chauffeur.

Once more he seemed to be on the verge of saying something further, but once more he repressed himself.

Besson got into the car. The footman put the bag and case in the rear. Besson nodded brusquely to the two servants, and sent the great machine out of the drive and swirling onto the street with the practised rapidity that was still his after his early years as a race-track driver before he had made his money. The sedan hummed out of sight in an incredibly short time.

CARLISLE turned to the footman. In the chauffeur's eyes was something like fear, and small beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

"What's up?" said the footman.

"You are mine, Beatrice Dale,"  
Doctor Satan said softly.



"The boss! Either he's going crazy—or I am."

"Why?"

"An hour ago," explained Carlisle, "the chief came out to the garage. I was washing down the town car. He called to me to ask if the sedan was checked, and I said it was. He got into it and drove out of the garage with it. He had a bag, and I thought he was starting his Cleveland trip then. It seemed kind of funny that he came out to the garage himself for the car instead of having me bring it around, but I didn't pay too much attention to it."

"He started out an hour ago, with a bag?" said the footman, staring. "That's funny."

"It isn't as funny as what happened next," Carlisle said. "In twenty-five minutes I heard a car roll into the garage—I was upstairs in my rooms. I came down, and there was the sedan. So I figured the boss had changed his mind and wasn't going to Cleveland after all.

"I went back upstairs, and three minutes ago, I'll be damned if he didn't phone out, ask if the sedan was checked, and tell me to bring it around to the side door here—just as if he hadn't been out

in the thing himself a little while ago and *knew* it was checked and ready for the trip."

"First the boss came out and drove away himself?" repeated the footman. "Then, just now, he called for the car to be sent around, just as though he hadn't been in it the first time? That *is* funny! In fact—it's impossible."

Carlisle stared at him, forehead wrinkled.

"For the last hour," said the footman, "Mr. Besson has been in his rooms. I overheard him dictating a few letters to his private secretary, and I helped his man pack his bag. So he couldn't have driven out of the garage and then back again!"

The chauffeur bit his lip. He was silent for a long time as the meaning of the statement came home to him.

"He didn't drive out of the garage an hour ago and come back again twenty-five minutes later? Then who did? And why?"

The footman shook his head.

"Did you see the boss's face?"

"No," admitted the chauffeur. "As I said, I was washing down the town car. I heard his voice, and saw his body as he climbed in behind the wheel. But it was his voice! I'll swear to that."

"Well," said the footman slowly, "somebody besides Besson took that car out for half an hour. I wonder—if they did something to it?"

The chauffeur wiped sweat from his forehead.

"It—it felt all right as I drove it out of the garage. But if a steering-rod was sawed half in two, or something——"

He stopped. Besson was a notoriously fast driver. He burned the roads at ninety miles an hour in his frequent trips to cities near Detroit.

"Maybe nothing was done to the car," said the footman through lips inclined to

be a little pale. "Better not say anything, anyhow, about this. It might get you into trouble."

Carlisle nodded. He went back to the garage. But on his face a look of foreboding grew.

With all his heart he hoped the sedan hadn't been tampered with. But common sense told him it must have been. A man wouldn't take risk and trouble to get it off the Besson property for half an hour without some reason behind the act.

"Who took that car out?" he whispered to himself as he went up to his quarters again. "*And what did they do to it?*"

**O**UT along the road to Cleveland, Besson sent the great sedan leaping like a live thing, unaware of the short trip it had made before he stepped into it. It was only eight in the evening. The road was fairly crowded with traffic; so Besson did not hit his highest road speed. The speedometer needle quivered at seventy.

Besson frowned a little in a puzzled way. And he *was* puzzled. He squirmed uneasily behind the wheel of the car.

His nerves felt as though each tiny end were being filed. And his hair was acting queerly. It had a tendency to rise on his scalp, prickling and itching as if it had turned to fine wires.

He took his hands off the wheel for an instant to see if there were a short circuit somewhere in the ignition system that was sending a little current up the steering-column and into the wheel. His sensation was vaguely of the kind induced by a slight electric shock. But lifting his hands from the wheel did not lessen the sensation. And glancing down at the seat beside him he saw that a bit of paper from a torn cigarette package clung to the velour as tissue paper clings to a comb that has just been drawn through hair.

Traffic cleared. Frowning, Besson pressed harder on the accelerator. The car leaped up to ninety-four miles an hour, roaring down the road with a sonorous, low-pitched scream.

No man saw what happened after that. A dozen pairs of eyes were drawn to the spot a second later; but none observed the entire proceeding.

At one moment the special-built car was racing along the concrete. At the next there was an enormous flare of violet-colored light—and there was no car there. Furthermore, there was no trace anywhere on the road or along the road that such a car had existed.

Besson, the sedan and everything else, had utterly disappeared.

A woman behind the counter of a roadside stand was the first of the dozen witnesses to break the awful silence following the blinding violet flare in which a man and a car had vanished utterly from the earth.

"Oh, my God!" she screamed.

It snapped the spell. Truck drivers, pleasure car owners, proprietors and patrons of the roadside stands near by, raced to the spot.

"My God!" the woman screamed again, shrill and high.

The men did not cry out, nor did they say anything. They simply looked first at each other and then at the road.

A long black streak of charred concrete was all the evidence left of the speeding sedan.

## 2. *The Death Engine*

**I**N THE experimental room of the Dryer Automobile Corporation, three men stood looking at a roadster.

Outside, in the great shop, all was thunder and clangor. The big machines that turned out the production stream of Detroit's third largest motor factory were

so expensive that they had to be run day and night; so that now, at ten in the evening, the uproar was as great as at ten in the morning.

But here in the corner laboratory the roar penetrated only as a murmur, and in critical silence the three men examined the roadster.

It was a tremendous thing. The wheel-base was nearly a hundred and sixty inches. The hood sloped off and away from the windshield as if the power of a locomotive were under it—which was almost the truth. It gleamed with the finest and latest of enamels; a toy to delight the heart of a rajah.

"Everything is all right?" said the chief engineer to a mechanic in dungarees near by.

"Listen for yourself," said the mechanic, switching on the motor.

Standing right next to the hood, you could scarcely hear the engine. The engineer nodded. A sour look was on his face.

"Twenty-eight thousand, that thing cost to build. Well, it's some car. It'll do about a hundred and forty, won't it?"

"A hundred and forty-eight," said the mechanic.

The engineer grinned bleakly.

"And Dryer's pampered son will use the speed, too. This is certainly a birthday present! When is it to be delivered?"

"First thing in the morning," replied the assistant. "I got orders two hours ago. I'm to drive it up in front of the Dryer house and leave it to 'surprize' Tom Dryer. Though he knows all about it, of course."

The head engineer turned to the mechanic.

"Stick a canvas over it," he ordered. "It would be a shame to get a scratch on papa's darling's plaything. I'll lock up."

The mechanic draped a great canvas, such as painters use, over the enormous

roadster. The men went to the door of the experimental room, and stepped out into the clangor of the shop. The engineer locked it.

But behind that closed door was not emptiness.

As the lock clicked on the room and the roadster, a shadow stirred in a far corner near a work-bench. The shadow was that of a man who had been lurking in there for over an hour.

The man, a shapeless outline in the darkness, went toward the roadster. He lifted the canvas from over the hood and raised the hood catch. From his pocket he took what appeared to be an aluminum box, a third as big as a cigar-box. He attached it to the reverse side of the dashboard.

From the box trailed four fine wires. One went to each wheel of the roadster. Then the man worked with the wheels. To each spoke was attached an almost invisible, flexible fin of colorless material. The fine trailing wires were adjusted so that the ends would almost touch the fins on the spokes as the wheels whirled.

The shadowy figure fastened the hood down and replaced the canvas. It glided toward the door. Over the penetrating roar of the busy shop outside sounded a faint laugh. It was an icy, blood-chilling sound, twice repeated. Then the door opened as if it had never been locked—closed again, this time on a room containing no human thing, but in which was a roadster that was far indeed from being the same mechanism as that which had been hand-built in the shop.

It was hardly fifteen minutes later when the door was opened once more and the lights switched on.

The chief engineer and another man were in the doorway. The other man was young, barely twenty-four. He was blond, dressed in a tuxedo, with no hat on and

with his hair rumpled a little. His blue eyes were too bright, and he swayed a bit on his feet.

"I'm going to take her out, I tell you," he was insisting to the engineer. "It's my car, isn't it? Why should I wait till tomorrow?"

"Your father will be very disappointed if you don't wait till tomorrow and use it then, on your birthday, for the first time," urged the engineer.

But the man, young Tom Dryer, only shrugged.

"I want it tonight. And what I say goes around here. Wheel it out."

"But——"

"Wheel it out, I tell you!"

The engineer shrugged. He got into the roadster, after taking off the shrouding canvas. A side door of the laboratory opened. He drove the roadster out and onto the cinder driveway leading from the fenced factory grounds.

"Boy, that's a job!" said Tom Dryer, his too bright eyes taking in the lines and power of the machine. He got in behind the wheel. The motor boomed.

"So long."

The young man waved his hand to the engineer, and drove off. The watchman at the yard gate barely had time to open the portals for the flying thing. Then young Dryer was out and off.

The engineer shook his head. His face was pale.

"So long," the boy had said. And it seemed to the older man that the words, and the parting wave of the hand, were prophetic. The farewell given for a long trip. A long, long one, perhaps.

"Drunk, and at the wheel of a thing that will go nearly a hundred and fifty miles an hour," the engineer whispered to himself. "I certainly hope——"

He turned back into the experimental laboratory without finishing the sentence.

**A**N HOUR later, at a little after midnight, the great new roadster fled like a silent, tremendous night bird over the open highway. Swaying a little behind the wheel was young Dryer. Beside him sat a girl with unnatural-looking red hair, and predatory gray eyes set in a face as flawlessly regular—and as uninspiring-looking—as a beauty on a magazine cover.

"Seventy," said Tom Dryer. "And you don't feel it any more than if you were going twenty. Wait till we hit an open stretch! I'll show you speed, baby!"

"Let's be satisfied with seventy," urged the girl. She was a little pale under her rouge as she glanced from the speedometer to his face.

"Don't be like that," laughed the boy. "That's an old maid's speed. I want to show you what this buggy can *do*!"

The girl was silent for a moment. She moved restlessly in the seat.

"Say," she exclaimed finally, "do you feel funny?"

"How do you mean?" said Dryer.

"Kind of itchy and nervous," said the girl.

"Nope."

"Well, I do. And my hair feels like—like it was being pulled by someone. I don't like it. And I don't like going so fast on a road where you're apt to go round a corner and meet a car piling toward you."

"Like this?" laughed Dryer, steering around a curve on the wrong side of the road with screaming tires. "Hang on, kid! This is a straight stretch ten miles long. Bet we can make it in five minutes."

The needle went to eighty-five.

"Tommy," shrieked the girl. "Don't, please! I—I feel——"

"Hang on!" Dryer repeated, shouting over the rush of wind. "You'll never have another ride like this!"

The needle went to a hundred.

"Tommy!" shrieked the girl. "I—oh, God——"

The night was split by a violet flare that could be seen for miles. Like concentrated lightning it burst forth, shattering the darkness along the road.

It blazed into being with no warning, persisted for about a half-second, and died as suddenly.

And on the road, where the great roadster had been, with a man and girl in it, was nothing. A charred black streak showed. That was all.

### 3. Satan Schemes

**I**N A tower suite of the Book Hotel next noon, two men sat talking.

One, thin, of average height, with thin gray hair and eyes lidded by colorless flaps that looked like the membranes veiling the eyes of a bird of prey, was president of the Universal Motors Corporation, Detroit's biggest automobile combine. The other was Ascott Keane, criminologist.

Keane got up from his chair and paced slowly back and forth across the room, his wide-shouldered, athletic body moving with the perfect muscular co-ordination of a trained athlete. His gray eyes were like chips of ice in his lean face. His black brows were drawn low.

"There is only one person on earth who could possibly be responsible for this," he said.

Corey, president of Universal, stared up at him. His veiled eyes looked more than ever like the eyes of a bird of prey—but of a very frightened bird, now. But even in his fright, he preserved his business caution. So many men, these days, claimed knowledge to which they had no right—and tried to extort money from you on that claim!

"Who is that?" he asked, warily.

"Doctor Satan," said Keane.

Corey sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"You are right. I guess you know the answer behind the—the disappearances, as you claim to do. The voice that spoke to me ended by insisting that its owner was somebody with the bizarre name, Doctor Satan."

Keane stared at the man. On Keane's face was a trace of impatience. He had read the man's thoughts, and didn't like them. But Corey, wealthy and powerful as he was, was only a pawn in this game. And one doesn't become annoyed with pawns.

"Tell me about the voice," he said.

Corey swallowed with difficulty. His face went greenish.

"I was in my office. The office is sound-proofed, so that no voice could have come from outside. I was alone—even my secretary had been sent out—and the door was locked. I sit alone like that often when I want to think out a problem. And while I was sitting there—a voice came to my ears.

"'You have heard the news,' the voice said. 'You have heard how Charles Besson, and Thomas Dryer, son of Dryer the motor magnate, were consumed in a mysterious violet flame.'"

Corey looked at Keane like a terrified child.

"It was almost like the voice of a second self speaking! It came so unobtrusively and—and naturally—that for a minute I wasn't startled at all. But then—I was. I realized that there wasn't a soul but myself in that locked, sound-proof room. A voice—save mine—*couldn't* sound in there! But this one did; a rasping, arrogant, metallic kind of voice. It went on:

"'You are thinking of that news now. You are planning how best to take advantage, in a business way, of the fact

that Besson had died suddenly, and that Dryer is stunned and helpless from the blow of his son's death.'

"That—that was true," Corey blurted out. "It was as if someone was reading my mind——"

"Someone was," Keane murmured. "Go on."

"Well, I *was* thinking about the business advantages that might accrue to Universal by the tragedies. Any man would." Corey shivered. "The voice said:

"'You have more important things to think about now. One is—your own life. Another is, how you can arrange your financial affairs so that you can take ten million dollars in cash from your fortune. For that is the price of your life. Ten million dollars. You will deliver it to my servant within the next few days, or you will die as Besson and Dryer died. I swear that, and Doctor Satan has never broken a vow.'"

Corey gnawed at the back of his bony, prehensile hand.

"Those aren't the exact words, but that's the message given by the voice. And that was the name: Doctor Satan. I'd have said the whole thing was some clever trick, played by a master at hypnotism or ventriloquism to cheat me out of money. I'd have defied the orders of the voice, of course—if it hadn't been for the awful way in which Besson and Dryer's son died. My God, can anyone really do that—consume people in violet flame—at will?"

Keane shrugged.

"According to the newspapers and many witnesses, someone can. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know. That's what I came here to ask. I had about decided to pay, when you phoned. How did you happen to get in touch with me, anyway, at such a crucial moment?" A bit of the



old wariness and business suspicion came back to Corey's face.

Keane smiled.

"The moment I read, in New York, of the inexplicable tragedies that had happened here, I flew to Detroit. Both victims had been prominent in motor manufacturing circles, so I looked for the next one. Your name is first on the list of prominence here, so I began with you, intending to run down the list of executives till I found one who had been threatened. I knew who was behind the crimes, and I know something of how he works, so my course of action was outlined for me. You told me you had been threatened; I asked you to see me—and that's the answer."

Corey sighed.

"Shall I pay this Doctor Satan? Ten million dollars! It's colossal! But life is more important than money——"

"Even if the price asked was only ten cents," snapped Keane, "you shouldn't pay it."

"But he'll kill me! The flame——"

Keane's long jaw squared. His firm mouth became firmer, grimmer.

"I've fought this man more than once," he said. "I've beaten him before. I'll do it again. Don't pay. Your life will be saved—if you take one precaution."

"And that?" said Corey eagerly.

"Don't ride in a car. In fact, don't ride in anything capable of high speed: bus, train, anything." He glanced toward the door, indicating that the interview was over. "If you refrain from that, you'll be all right."

COREY went out. The door opened after his exit, and Keane's secretary came into the room. Tall, lithe, beautiful, with dark blue eyes and hair more red than brown, she stared at her employer with a look in her eyes that would have revealed much to him had he been

gazing at her at the moment instead of looking unseeingly out the window at the roof-tops of the automobile city. Beatrice Dale's feelings for Ascott Keane were apparent to everyone—save Ascott Keane. Marvelously astute in all other matters, in this one he remained singularly obtuse. And it appeared that he always would!

Beatrice sighed and came up to him.

"You have found out how the deaths were caused?" she asked, professionally, with the glow hidden in her eyes

Keane nodded absently.

"I have found out several things. Not exactly, in detail, but closely enough to map out my plans.

"Doctor Satan is up to his old methods of harnessing the forces of nature to do his crimes for him. It was nature that killed Besson and Dryer's son. Static electricity.

"Both Besson and young Dryer were notoriously fast drivers. Very well, Doctor Satan contrived a method of generating and storing static electricity in enormous amounts. Probably the generating was done by the wheels themselves, turning at fast speeds. The electricity was stored in some small device that wouldn't be noticed if examination was made of the car before it was taken out. When a voltage was built up that would be far beyond any amount that could be registered on any recording instruments yet devised, it exploded the storage device—and utterly consumed car and occupants and everything else. That is the only thing that would explain the violet light told of by the witnesses. In a way, a natural death. But a gruesome, fearful, spectacular death—which would so horrify and cow other motor manufacturers that they would give Doctor Satan anything he asked rather than risk the same fate themselves."

"Horrifying and fearful enough," breathed Beatrice with a shiver. "Ascott

—you have escaped the other deaths this fiend has invented. Can you escape this? For of course he'll turn the new weapon on you, too. More than anything else on earth, he wants to get rid of you. He'll try to kill you as soon as he learns you are here."

Keane laughed a little, without humor.

"As soon as he knows I'm here? My dear, you underestimate him. As surely as we live and breathe—he knows that now!"

**A**T TWENTY minutes past noon a man in the dungarees of the Union Airlines mechanics turned off a sidewalk into the yard of a factory. It was a small factory, two stories high, less than an eighth of a block square. Its windows were boarded up. The yard was grown with weeds.

A man sat in the open doorway of the deserted-looking building. He was an elderly man, poorly dressed. His faded blue eyes stared straight ahead with curious blankness. His face was stubbled with three days' growth of grayish beard.

The man in dungarees came up to the doorway. A small, monkey-like fellow with a mat of hair over his face through which peered small, cruel eyes, he hopped as he walked in an oddly animal way.

"Is anyone in?" he asked the watchman.

The watchman's faded blue eyes did not move. They continued to look straight ahead as he sat there like a statue.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"How many?" asked the man in dungarees.

"Two, sir."

The watchman's lips moved like mechanical things. He looked and acted like something actuated with springs and wires.

The little man in dungarees shivered a bit. His pale eyes narrowed with an emo-

tion that might have been fear. He walked past the watchman, who did not move a muscle, and into the factory building.

It was dark in here in spite of the noon daylight outside. The reason was that the entire inside of the first floor was draped closely in heavy black fabric, which also stretched from a frame crossing in front of the door, so that the door could be open innocently and yet outside eyes could not see in and detect the black drapes.

The little man passed under the door drape. He entered the dark interior, which was dimly lit by red electric bulbs so that it resembled a corner of some weird inferno.

Over a bench on which was a glistening small receptacle about a third the size of a cigar-box, a figure bent which was like something seen in a fanciful illustration of hell: a tall, gaunt figure draped from head to heels in a red robe, with red gloves shielding the hands, and a red mask over the face. Even over the head of the figure, red had been draped: a skull-cap, from which protruded two Luciferian horns in imitation of the horns of the Devil.

Next to this eery figure was the body of a legless man—gigantic torso supported by calloused, powerful hands.

"Girse," said the imperious, red-draped figure, without turning its head.

The little man in dungarees drew a quick breath. The red figure had its back toward him. It could not have heard his soft entrance. Yet, as though it had been facing him, that entry had been noted.

"Yes, Doctor Satan," he said.

"Report, please."

Girse hopped closer in his monkey-like fashion, and stood next to Bostiff, the legless giant. From under the voluminous dungarees he drew a flat leather case.

"Miller, the truck manufacturer, did as you ordered," he said docilely to Doctor

Satan. "Here are thirty checks, of one hundred thousand dollars apiece."

Doctor Satan's coal-black eyes glowed from the eyeholes of the red mask. In them was glacial triumph.

"It is well. You got into the Union Airlines hangar?"

"I did," said Girse, his pale eyes glinting.

"You attached the storage cube?"

"I did, with the wire leading to the propeller, and with fins attached to the propeller blades."

Unholy satisfaction glittered in the coal-black eyes. Then it was dimmed, and the light of rage glowed there.

"It will be as we wish it—unless Keane discovers it in time."

"Keane—is here?" quavered Girse.

Bostiff spat out an oath, his dull eyes red with fury.

"He is here," grated Doctor Satan. "I gleaned that from the mind of Corey. He is here, in Detroit. And Corey has seen him and was advised not to meet my demands. That was foreseen—which is why you attached the storage cube to the propeller. He is in a tower suite at the Book Hotel, with his secretary Beatrice Dale. And he is daring to match his wits against mine once more."

Icy murder flared in the coal-black eyes. The red-gloved hands closed slowly, quivering.

"This time, Ascott Keane dies! This time I will get rid of the one obstacle between me and unlimited power, through fear, over the minds of men."

He turned back to the bench, with his red-gloved fingers delicately adjusting tiny, fine plates of some substance like mica which packed the interior of the small metal container on which he was working—a container like that which had been attached to the sedan of Besson and the roadster of young Tom Dryer.

"With Keane out of the way," he

grated, "I could be supreme on earth—and I will be!"

#### 4. *The Voice of Satan*

THE late evening papers gave the news of Doctor Satan's latest blow against the ancient law: Thou shalt not kill. Beatrice Dale brought the paper in to Keane, who was about to go out, and handed it to him without a word.

Keane read the account, then crumpled the paper in a grim hand.

"Corey dies in unique plane accident," the item was headed. And across half the front page was spread the account:

This afternoon at four o'clock Mr. H. C. Corey, president of Universal Motors, was killed in an airplane accident twenty miles out from the Detroit landing-field.

Mr. Corey, called on urgent business to New York City, chartered the plane for himself alone and took off at three-forty. The plane circled the field once, then headed east. Twenty miles from the field it exploded.

Union Airline officials have no explanation to make. The explosion, according to eye-witnesses, was accompanied by a violet flame, which is not the type of flame resulting from gasoline explosions. . . .

Keane drew a deep breath.

"'Called on urgent business to New York City,'" he quoted. "The fool! He committed suicide. Doctor Satan gave that call, of course. And Corey, fearing financial loss, disobeyed my orders. I told him not to ride in anything capable of speed."

He went toward the door.

"I'm going to Besson's home," he said to Beatrice. "I want a talk with Besson's chauffeur about the sedan the man was killed in. I'll be back in an hour."

CARLISLE, Besson's chauffeur, bit his lips as he faced Keane in the cool dimness of the great garage.

"I suppose I should have gone to the police about it," he said unsteadily. "But I couldn't see what good that would do them, and I knew I'd get in a lot of trouble over it."

"Tell me more exactly what happened," Keane urged.

"Well, at a little before seven o'clock, I was in here washing down the town car. Mr. Besson came out and asked if the sedan was ready. I said yes, and he got into it——"

"You're sure it was Besson?"

"No, later I realized I couldn't be sure," Carlisle admitted. "I heard his voice, and I'll swear it *was* his voice. And I saw his back, and he was wearing a checked suit as he usually does. But I'll have to confess I didn't see his face."

"Girse," murmured Keane. "Made up as Besson—with Satan himself speaking in Besson's voice from a distance. . . ."

"What?" said Carlisle.

"Nothing. Go on."

"That's about all. The man I thought was Mr. Besson went out, with a bag and everything as if on the Cleveland trip, and then came back in about half an hour. I didn't see him return—I only heard the car drive in and went down and found the sedan. The first I knew something was wrong was when Besson called, half an hour later, asking if the sedan was ready for his trip! I thought he'd gone crazy, then."

"You have no idea where the sedan was driven in that half-hour?" said Keane.

"None at all," said Carlisle. "And now, of course, no one will ever know. Because there isn't any sedan to look over any more."

Keane's lips compressed.

"There's no sedan, but I think we can find out where it went in that fatal half-hour. Have you cleaned out in here recently?"

Carlisle looked at the floor of the garage and shook his head.

"We haven't kept up quite the schedule we usually do since the boss—died. The garage floor hasn't been swept——"

"Good," said Keane. "Where did the sedan stand in here?"

Carlisle indicated the space nearest the end wall. Keane went there, bending low, critically examining the concrete.

"The man drove it back into this spot before Besson took it out?"

Carlisle nodded. Keane got to his knees.

There were slight flakes of dust and dirt from a car's tires on the floor. Keane took up some of these and put them carefully in an envelope. He turned to go.

"Shall I tell the cops about this?" said Carlisle, white-faced.

Keane shook his head. "It would get you in a lot of trouble, as you said. And I don't think it would do any good. You can't be blamed for being fooled by the man who killed your employer."

He went out, with the chauffeur's thankful and admiring gaze following him.

AT THE curb before the Besson home was the coupé Keane had hired to get about the city in. He got in behind the wheel and headed for the near-down-town section.

He was on his way to the laboratory of a friend of his. In New York he had his own laboratory, vastly better than the one owned by his friend; but he hadn't time to send to New York and he thought the friend's equipment would be sufficient enough to perform the task he wanted.

As a man will do sometimes, Keane broke his own strict rule—disregarded the very warning he had given Corey: not to ride in anything capable of speed.

In a hurry to get the scrapings of the sedan's tires analyzed, he drove like a black comet along the boulevards; drove that way till suddenly his hair began to feel as though it were standing on end and every nerve in his body tingled and rasped with exasperating sensitivity,

His face paled a little then. With his lips drawn back to show his set teeth, he jammed down the brakes of the car.

"Static electricity!" he whispered to himself. "The devil! Does he think he can get *me* that way?"

He opened the hood of the car.

Attached to the underside of the dash was a metal container. From it led a fine wire. The wire went to the fan whirling at the front of the motor. And to the fan-blades fine fins of some flexible, colorless stuff had been attached.

With a savage jerk, Keane ripped the wire loose from the metal box. But the box itself he detached carefully to take home for further study. He knew that the secret of the violet explosions lay in that box; a secret consisting in what possible manner of substance could act as a storage battery for static electricity and store the stuff till an explosion point was reached.

With Doctor Satan frustrated and his life no longer in danger, Keane went on to his friend's laboratory and presented the tire scrapings for analysis.

"Mixed in with the normal dirt of the streets," the friend reported a little later, "there are two substances which might tell you where the car has been. One is a trace of cinders, such as is to be found in many factory yards. The other is a powdered chemical which turns out to be a special kind of lime fertilizer."

"So?" said Keane.

"So this," replied the man. "There is only one plant in Detroit which manufactures that particular type of lime fertilizer. That is a plant out on Jefferson Avenue." He gave the address. "It is at least possible that Besson's sedan was driven near the plant during its half-hour absence and picked up a little of the fertilizer, spilled on the street from trucking."

"And the trace of cinders?"

The man shrugged.

"That particular company does not have cinder surfaces in its yards. I telephoned to find out. They must have come from somewhere else."

Keane thanked him and went out. His light gray eyes were glittering, his firm mouth was a bleak slit in his face. Cinders, and dust of a fertilizer made only in one spot in the city! He thought that should provide a trail to the spot in Detroit where Doctor Satan lurked like a human spider spinning new and ever more ghastly webs.

He went to the Book Hotel, to study the shining metal container he'd got from his dash, and try to penetrate its secret, before making the next and last move that should bring him face to face with Doctor Satan himself.

But the study was never to be made. Fate was not to allow him the time.

AT THE hotel desk he told the clerk to ring Miss Dale's room and ask her to come to his suite with notebook and pencil. His phone was ringing when he opened his door.

"Miss Dale is not in her room, sir," the clerk reported.

Keane's eyebrows went up. Then they drew down into heavy, straight black lines over his light gray eyes as apprehension began to gnaw at his brain.

He went to the room in the tower suite which he had set aside to use as office and workroom.

"Beatrice," he called, looking around for the quietly beautiful girl who was more right hand to him than mere secretary.

The room was empty. So were the other rooms.

With the apprehension mounting to chill certainty in his mind, Keane looked around. He found his hands clenching and sweat standing out on them as his

quick imagination grasped the significance of her absence.

An exclamation burst from his lips. Half under the desk in his temporary office he saw a glove. It was a tan glove of the type he had seen Beatrice wear last. Just the one glove.

Near the door, now, he saw the other. . . .

"My God!" he whispered.

Beatrice had gone out of the hotel. That was a certainty. But—she never went out ungloved. It was one of her fastidious habits. Yet there were the gloves she wore with the brown street costume she'd had on when Keane left her. . . .

His head bent swiftly, and a terrible fear leaped into his eyes. A voice had sounded.

"Ascott Keane," it said—and it was hard to tell whether it was an actual voice or a thought making itself articulate in his own brain. "You escaped the death waiting for you under the hood of your coupé. You shall face death later at my hands, in spite of that. But before death comes for you, you shall have the pleasure of imagining, as you are doubtless doing now, the lingering fate that shall be dealt out to your able assistant, Beatrice Dale. I have her, Keane. And when you next see her, if you ever do, I'm afraid you'll be unable to recognize her."

There was a low, icy laugh, and the voice ceased.

"My God!" breathed Keane again.

And then he was racing from the room, with agony in his heart but keeping the agony carefully walled off from the cold and rapid efficiency with which his keen mind could work in times of great emergency.

"There is only one plant in Detroit which manufactures that particular type of lime fertilizer," his laboratory friend

had said. "That is a plant out on Jefferson Avenue. . . ."

Keane got into the coupé, wrenched the wheel around, and pressed the accelerator to the floorboard as he sped out Jefferson Avenue.

### 5. *Living Death*

KEANE went straight to the plant from near which the tires of Besson's sedan had picked up the significant trace of fertilizer. There he paused a moment outside the high wire fence enclosing the company's grounds. But he hesitated only a moment. There were no cinders in that yard, as the laboratory man had said. And the sedan had been some place where cinders had paved a space. Also the company grounds were swarming with workmen. No one could drive a car in, tamper with it, and drive away again unnoticed.

He started on away from the plant, and farther away from the center of town. There was only the one direction to go in. The sedan, to have picked up the fertilizer trace, would have had to go beyond this point.

He drove very slowly, examining intently the properties on each side of the street. But it was only with an effort that he kept himself from driving like mad, senselessly, aimlessly, so long as he covered a lot of ground in a hurry.

Beatrice. . . .

Never had he had such urge for speed—but speed did no good when he didn't know where he was going.

Beatrice. . . .

"I have her, Keane. And when next you see her, if you ever do, I'm afraid you'll be unable to recognize her."

That was what Doctor Satan had said. Where in God's name was she? And what was Satan planning to do to her?

He bit his lips, and kept the coupé down to a speed at which he could scan

the buildings he passed. And then he started a little, and lowered his head rapidly and drove by the place that had attracted his attention. The place was perfectly innocent-looking. It was a small factory less than fifty yards from the sidewalk on the left-hand side. But two things had riveted his attention.

The first was that the grounds around the factory were cinder-paved. The second was that the place was abandoned, with boarded-up windows and an air of desolation.

An abandoned factory, in a not-too-populous part of the city. . . .

Keane got out of the coupé and walked back a half-block. He saw that an elderly man, patently a watchman, sat in the open side-doorway of the factory.

He hesitated an instant, then walked openly toward the man. He couldn't have hidden his approach anyhow, and thought he could overpower the watchman if his suspicions of the place were verified and the man tried to give an alarm to others inside.

His eyes fastened to the watchman with increasing curiosity as he approached. He saw that the man was cheaply dressed, with faded blue eyes and a stubble of grayish beard on his face. And he saw that the eyes stared off and away in the oddest, most unseeing way imaginable. Also he noticed how unmoving the old man was. He sat in the doorway like a statue, not shifting his position in any way. Even when Keane had come quite close, he did not move.

Keane stared down at him with growing grimness. He could see the man's pulse beat in the vein in his throat; but it seemed to him that the pulse-beat was incredibly slow. He could see the hair of his stubble of beard closer; and it appeared that the flesh of the man's face had receded from the hair-roots, more than that the hair itself had grown.

Keane felt a chill touch his spine. Realization, like a spike of ice, began to sink into his brain. But he still could not quite believe.

"Hello," he said to the man, in a low voice.

"Hello," the man replied.

He said the word with his lips hardly moving, and with his eyes staring blindly straight ahead.

Keeping his voice almost in a whisper, so that it could not be heard through the open doorway in which the man sat, he said:

"Are you alone here?"

"There are—four inside," the watchman replied, creakily.

Keane moistened his lips.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"It is——"

The man stopped, like a run-down machine. His faded, unblinking eyes stared straight ahead.

Keane stopped, then. He touched the watchman's wrist, and shuddered.

Perceptibly he could feel a pulse, beating perhaps twenty to the minute. He could see the man's chest rise and fall with immensely decelerated breathing.

Pulse, and breathing. And the man could speak and, up to a point, answer questions. But that man was dead!

Keane dropped the wrist, icy as something long immersed in water. His lips were a thin line in his face. A dead man on guard! A watchman whose presence here would be missed, and who therefore had been left in his accustomed place so that passers-by would have no suspicion that anything unusual was taking place inside!

He had found Doctor Satan. The presence of a living dead man where a live and vital human being should be, proclaimed the fact like a shout.

Keane drew a long breath. Then he stepped past the dead man, who sat on

with faded blue eyes staring into space. He entered the doorway. His eyes, accustomed themselves to the darkness, detected the presence of the black drapes swathing the interior and making of it a smaller room-within-a-room. At the same time his ears caught an arrogant, glacial voice—a voice that made the hair on his neck crawl with remembrance and primeval fear. The voice of Doctor Satan.

Edging his way along between the drapes and the wall, careful to touch neither, Keane moved to a spot where the harsh and imperious voice sounded farthest away. Then he took out a knife, slit the black fabric, and looked through.

**T**HE first thing his eyes rested on—was Beatrice Dale.

She sat on the floor of the abandoned factory with her slim arms down by her sides, and her silk-sheathed legs out in front of her. Arms and legs were bound; and a gag was around her lips. Over the gag her eyes stared out, wide and frightened, yet, in the last analysis, composed. Keane felt a hard thrill of admiration for her fortitude go through him as he looked into her eyes.

Over her bent the figure he had seen before several times in the flesh—and many times in nightmares. A tall, gaunt body sheathed in a red robe, with a red mask covering the face and a red skull-cap over the hair.

Keane bit his lips as he noted the knobs, like horns, that protruded from the Luciferian skull-cap. Those mocking small projections were the keynote of the character motivating Doctor Satan. A man who took pride in his fiendishness! A man who robbed and killed, and broke the laws of man and God, not for gain, because he already had more than any one person could spend, but solely for thrills! A being jaded with the standard

pleasures of the world, and turning to monstrous, sadistic acts to justify his existence and give him the sense of power he craved!

Next to the red-robed figure, Keane saw Doctor Satan's two malevolent henchmen, Girse and Bostiff.

Girse, small and monkey-like, was gazing at the girl's form with his pale eyes like cruel beads in the hair covering his face. Bostiff, supporting his giant's torso on his calloused hands, swayed back and forth in a sort of dull ecstasy.

Again Doctor Satan's voice came to Keane's ears.

"I have not yet decided what I shall do with you," the harsh voice pronounced. "You are beautiful. I am alone in the world—and it is not inappropriate that Lucifer take a consort. But that consort should not be a mere living woman such as lesser beings have. You noticed the watchman as you were borne into this place?"

Keane saw a spasm twitch Beatrice's face, saw her eyes wince with terror.

"I see you did," Doctor Satan said. "And I see you sensed his state. A dead man, my dear—yet a man who will breathe and move in a sort of suspended animation as long as I shall will it. A man whose automatic reflexes can still dimly function, so that the dead brain may direct the muscles of throat and lips to answer verbally any questions not too complex, and so that the body may move to orders not too difficult."

Doctor Satan's grating, inhuman laugh sounded out.

"It comes to my mind," he said, "that Lucifer might here find a fitting mate. The devil's consort—death. A beautiful woman who must answer as required, and who must move without question to fulfill her master's least demand. That would be unique—and amusing. Think how Ascott Keane would react to that."



Keane, motionless behind the drape, with his eye to the slit in the fabric, felt perspiration trickle down his cheeks. The man was diabolical. He was beyond madmen in the aims he pursued and the goals he achieved. Yet he was not mad. That was perhaps the most hideous part of it. He was sane. Icily, brilliantly sane!

And now Doctor Satan went on with that in his voice which made Keane suddenly tense in every muscle as instinctive small warnings prickled in his brain.

"The reactions of Ascott Keane to that spectacle. . . . Very interesting. I must see them. In fact—I *will see them!*"

Like a flash of light the red-robed body whirled. The coal-black eyes of the man glared through the eyeholes of the red mask—glared straight into the eyes of Keane, pressed to the slit in the black fabric.

Impossible that he should see Keane's eyes in the dim red light of the black-shaded room! Impossible that he should have heard Keane breathe or move! Yet he knew the criminologist was there!

For a moment that seemed an age, Doctor Satan's glittering black eyes stared into Keane's steely gray ones. Then the red mask moved with words.

"You will come here, Ascott Keane."

Keane's legs moved.

Savagely he fought the muscles of his own body, which were like relentless rebels in the way they disobeyed the dictates of his will. But the muscles won.

His legs moved. And they bore him forward, like an automaton, so that the black drapes moved forward with him, slithered over his head, and sank back into place behind him.

He walked up to where Doctor Satan and Girse and Bostiff ringed the bound, helpless girl. There he stood before the man in red, eyes like steel chips as they glinted with savage but impotent fury.

"Will you never learn, Keane, that my

will towers over yours, and my power goes beyond yours?" Doctor Satan crooned.

Keane said nothing. He looked at Beatrice, and saw that into her eyes had crept a horror that went beyond the fright that had entered them at mention of the living dead man who guarded this red-lit inferno.

He could feel his body responding sluggishly to the commands of his brain, now. But the recovery was feeble. He could not have moved toward Doctor Satan to save his life, though with every fiber of him he craved to throw himself on the man and rip the red mask from his face and batter that face into a thing as unhuman in appearance as its owner's soul was in reality.

"Girse," said Doctor Satan.

That was all. The little man hopped in obedience. He came close to Keane with his right hand hidden behind his back.

Keane gasped and tried to throw his arms up as he read in the little man's mind the command Satan had wordlessly given him. But his arms moved too slowly to prevent the next act.

Girse lashed forward with his own arm. Something glittering in his right hand pressed into Keane's flesh. He felt a sharp sting, then complete physical numbness.

He sank to the floor. But though his body was a dead thing, his mind continued to function with all its normal perception.

Doctor Satan's glacial laugh rang out.

"The great Ascott Keane," he sneered. "We shall see how he meets his own fate—and that of his efficient secretary, toward whom his secret emotions are not quite as platonic as his conscious mind believes."

He turned to the little man.

"Girse," he said again. That was all.

The rest of the command was unspoken. But all too clearly, with the telepathic powers that were his, Keane caught that too. He fought in an agony of helplessness to make his body move, as Girse hopped toward Beatrice. But he was as immobile as though paralyzed.

Again Girse held a hypodermic needle, but this was a larger one than the one he had plunged into Keane's body.

**W**ITH his pale eyes shining, the monkey-like little man pressed the needle into Beatrice Dale's bound left arm. The girl closed her eyes. A strangled moan came through the gag that bound her lips. Keane croaked out an oath and struggled again with a body as limp and moveless as a dead thing.

"The drug in that hypodermic is quick-acting," Doctor Satan said. "Observe, Keane."

With starting eyes, Keane saw how true the words were.

Into the girl's eyes already had crept the terrible, unseeing look that characterized the faded eyes of the thing outside in the doorway. He could see the pulse in her throat slow down. Slower . . . slower. . . .

"She's dead, Keane," said Doctor Satan emotionlessly. "Though, dead, she will obey better than alive. Girse."

Once more the monkey-like small man approached the girl. In his hand was a knife. He slit the bonds that held her, and removed her gag.

"Come to me, Beatrice Dale," commanded Doctor Satan.

Through a red haze, Keane saw the girl get to her feet, slowly, unsteadily. She walked toward the figure in red, moving like one asleep.

"You are mine, Beatrice Dale," Doctor Satan said softly.

There was a perceptible hesitation. Was the girl's brain, even in death, strug-

gling against the monstrous statement? Then her lips moved, as the lips of the thing in the doorway had moved, like the lips of a mechanical doll.

"I am yours."

Keane panted on the floor. He could not even cry out. His vocal cords were numbed by the drug, as was the rest of his body.

Doctor Satan stared down at Keane.

"And so, my friend," his harsh voice grated out, "we see the end. Your aide has become—as you see. You yourself shall presently die as Besson and Dryer and Corey died. The end. . . . Bostiff."

The legless giant hitched his way forward on his long arms.

"The flywheel, Bostiff," Doctor Satan said. "Girse, attach the cube of death to Keane."

And now Keane glanced at a thing he had seen only perfunctorily, and noticed not at all, until now: On a length of rusty shafting in the rear of the factory room was a big flywheel, which had performed some power service when the factory was busy. To this was belted an electric motor.

Bostiff hitched his way to the flywheel. As he went, he trailed behind him a fine wire only too familiar to Keane; the kind of wire that had led to the metal box Keane had detached from his coupé before death should strike him. To the spokes of the flywheel, Keane knew, were fastened the colorless, unobtrusive fins which generated the static death that had struck down the motor millionaires.

Girse fastened to Keane's chest a metal cube which had been resting on a low bench near by. Bostiff fastened the other end of the wire leading from it, to a point near the flywheel. Then he started the motor.

The big flywheel started turning over. Doctor Satan's eyes burned down at Keane.

"In five minutes, approximately," he said, "there will be a violet flare. In that flare, you will be consumed. Just before it occurs, the drug that holds you will begin to disappear, so that you shall be the more keenly aware of your fate. We shall, naturally, wait outside till the bursting into flame of the building announces that you are no longer alive to annoy me."

He turned toward the dead girl. "Come, my dear."

Beatrice walked toward the draped door, her body swaying a little from the impairment of her sense of balance, her eyes staring unblinkingly ahead. Doctor Satan followed. Behind came Girse and Bostiff.

Doctor Satan raised the drape. The three passed through ahead of him. He stared at Keane.

"Four minutes now," he said. And then he followed the others.

### 6. *Two Metal Cubes*

KEANE was lying so that he could see the watch at his wrist. He watched the little second hand fly around its circle three times. He listened to the whirring of the great flywheel, gathering static electricity through its fins; such a colossal store of it as even the lightning could not rival—to be held in the mysterious metal cube on his chest till it had gathered beyond the cube's power to contain it any longer. Then the cube would be consumed, and consume everything around it like a tremendous blown fuse. . . .

Keane stared at the watch. He had a hundred seconds of life left. One hundred seconds. . . .

But his counting of the seconds was not actuated solely by the fear of death. His mind had never been keener, colder than it was now. Ascott Keane was waiting for the first sign of returning movement in his muscles. When that occurred

he had a plan to try. It was a plan the success of which hinged on facts unknown to him. But its steps seemed logical.

He felt burning pain in his finger ends, then in his hands. Grimly he moved his fingers, searing with returning life. He flexed his hands. He had forty seconds—perhaps a little longer, perhaps a little less, for Doctor Satan could not foretell to the second when the static force stored in the metal cube should burst its bonds in the terrific violet flare.

Now he could move his right arm feebly from the elbow. He dragged it up by sheer will till it went to his coat pocket. In that coat pocket was a factor—or a possible factor—which Doctor Satan had not reckoned with: the metal cube with its broken end of wire, which Keane had taken from his coupé for analysis which he had not had time to make.

He got the cube from his pocket. His watch told him he had twenty seconds, a third of a minute, to live.

With maddening slowness, his hand moved. It found the wire from the box in his pocket. With numbed fingers it pressed the broken bit of wire to the other cube. . . .

The fifteen seconds that passed then were an age.

Keane's idea was that with two of the storage cubes hooked together, it would take twice as long for the spinning flywheel to generate the static force that was presently to consume him. As simple as that! And, even though he knew nothing of the substance in the cubes capable of storing the force, he thought its action must be as logical as it was simple.

If it took minutes longer for the building, with Keane in it, to go up in violet flames, Doctor Satan might come back to see what was wrong. . . .

The zero second approached, passed. Keane held his breath. Ten seconds

passed, and still death did not strike. The flywheel turned, the gathering static electricity rasped his nerves and stood his hair on end, but the violet flare did not dart toward the heavens.

Twenty seconds went by, and Keane breathed again—and watched the draped door. He could move arms and legs now, and a bath of flaming agony told that all his body would be soon released from the grip of the paralyzing drug.

Two minutes had gone by before he saw the drapes at the door move. And then—Girse came in. Girse! Not his master! But Girse, Keane thought, would do.

The monkey-like little man came into the red-lit room, and to his merited end. Keane's steely eyes were on him. Through them, as through shining little gates, his iron will leaped at the man.

Girse stiffened in the doorway. Then, in obedience to Keane's unspoken command, he walked to Keane's side.

"You came to see why the violet flame has not burst out?" Keane said.

"Yes," said Girse, his wide, helpless eyes riveted on Keane's.

"Doctor Satan is outside with Bostiff and the girl?"

"Yes," said Girse. A spasm passed over his hairy face, as though apprehension struggled with the deep hypnosis in which he was held.

"Answer this," snapped Keane, "and answer it truly. The girl, Beatrice Dale, is now dead. Do you know of a way to make her live again?"

God, the agony that went into Keane's waiting for that answer! And then Girse's lips moved.

"Yes."

Keane drew a deep breath. He was standing now, tottering a little, but almost entirely recovered.

"What is the method? Tell me quickly—and truly."

"The drug that killed her is its own antidote. More of it will bring back to life any who have been dead for not more than half an hour."

"Thank God!" said Keane.

And then he acted. And as he did so, before his mind ran the list of crimes this man, with Doctor Satan as his leader and the unspeakable Bostiff as his comrade, had committed. The list took all pity from his face.

He fastened the two metal cubes to the man whose body was held in his mental thrall. Then he went to the door, backing toward it with his commanding eyes ever on Girse.

The flywheel turned with a monotonous whirring. The fins attached to its spokes sent down the fine wire the accumulation of current. Millions, billions of volts, filling the mysterious storage capacity of the first cube, reaching toward the capacity of the second.

**K**EANE looked at his watch. In thirty seconds, if Doctor Satan were right, the two cubes should explode with double the violence planned on. . . .

There was a violet flare that seemed to fill the world. Keane was knocked backward out of a doorway that an instant later became nonexistent.

A glimpse he had of a man who sprawled over and over with the force of the shock and then relaxed to lie at last in the actual death hitherto denied him. The dead watchman! Then he was staring into coal-black eyes that glinted with a fear that never before had touched their arrogant depths.

"Keane!" whispered Doctor Satan, as the criminologist faced him. "You weren't . . . then it was Girse. . . ."

"It was Girse who died," said Keane—and sprang.

With a pleasure that sent a savage

thrill to his finger-tips, he got his hands around the red-swathed throat.

"The drug that made that girl as she is," he grated. "I want it."

Doctor Satan's voice gurgled behind the red mask. His hand went under his robe. The fear of death—that exaggerated fear felt by all killers when they themselves feel death approach—gleamed in his eyes. He drew out the big hypodermic.

"How much is the reviving amount?" grated Keane.

"Two . . . calibrated marks . . . on the . . . plunger," gasped Doctor Satan as Keane's fingers relaxed. "The same as . . . the lethal dose. . . ."

"Death, or renewed life, the same," whispered Keane.

Then a bleak smile shaped his firm lips. He took the hypodermic.

With the swiftness of a leaping serpent his hand moved. And death poured into Doctor Satan's veins!

Keane slowly got up. The coal-black eyes faded. They became dull splotches through the mask's eyeholes.

Keane shot the stated amount into Beatrice's white arm. There was barely enough. With his heart in his throat he watched her reactions.

"Thank God!" he whispered.

Color was slowly seeping into her cheeks. Her eyes blinked, then began to lose that deathly dullness. The pulse increased toward normal in the throat vein.

Keane turned toward Doctor Satan and his face wore the same grim look it had worn when he left Girse to his merited destruction.

"Get up," he said.

Slowly, stiffly, Doctor Satan rose. His dead eyes peered straight ahead.

The factory building was a solid blaze. Shouts and sounds of running feet announced the beginning gathering of a crowd in the street.

"Walk straight ahead—and keep walking," Keane snapped.

The red-clad figure, like a dread automaton, walked straight ahead—toward the roaring flames. Keane waited, with bleak victory in his tired eyes, till the figure was on the brink of the flames. Then he turned to Beatrice.

"What?" she faltered.

He helped her up.

"Don't talk. Just come with me," he soothed. And, in answer to the look in her eyes: "Doctor Satan? He's dead at last. In the flames. It's triumph for us."

He helped her to the curb and through the milling crowd to his coupé. . . .

It was the first major mistake of Keane's life.

"Two calibrated marks on the plunger," Doctor Satan had said was the reviving dose of the drug. "The same as the lethal dose. . . ."

The revival amount had been correct; Beatrice was alive again to prove it. It did not occur to Keane that Satan might have lied about the other.

So he did not see the red-clad figure draw back from the flames as soon as he had turned and started leading the girl from the cinder yard. He did not see Doctor Satan crawl behind a rusted pile of metal tanks, nor see, a moment later, a figure clad in conventional dark clothes emerge, leaving behind it a red, Luciferian costume that would have been too conspicuous to wear where many could observe.

"Victory," he said again, with shining eyes, as he drove toward the hotel.

But near the blazing factory behind him and Beatrice a tall figure drew itself up with quivering fists and muttered:

"I swear by the Devil, my master, to avenge myself on Ascott Keane for the death of my man, Girse, and the humiliation I myself have this day felt at his hands!"