

# Weird Tales

MAY

*The Unique Magazine*



## **THE DEVIL'S DOUBLE**

*a powerful tale of the ghastly Blue Death*

By **PAUL ERNST**

25c

**ARTHUR J. BURKS    EDMOND HAMILTON    SEABURY QUINN    ROBERT BLOCH**

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 27                      CONTENTS FOR MAY, 1936                      Number 5

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 66 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Devil's Double

By PAUL ERNST

*A powerful, blood-chilling thrill-tale about the Blue Death and the world's weirdest criminal, who called himself Doctor Satan*

## 1. *The Mad Dancer*

IT WAS the middle of an early summer afternoon in Louisville. The sun bathed the streets with hot gold. People thronged the main avenue. Women shoppers streamed in and out of the stores; men hurried on business; traffic rolled in orderly haste.

The middle of a prosaic afternoon. All seemed as it should be. . . .

A town car turned onto the avenue from a side street. It was a big foreign car, speaking of great wealth. Its curtains were drawn.

The town car stopped before a building which was under construction. The sidewalk here was railed off to prevent pedestrians on the walk from being struck by falling bricks. But as the town car halted, a man appeared from the interior of the unfinished building. He walked unobtrusively past the car.

As he passed, one of the curtains over the car windows was raised. A shaking hand came out with a newspaper-wrapped package in it. The man from the building took the package. He walked back into the building again.

The town car's motor raced preparatory to going away. But before it could get into motion, another car with curtained windows swung onto the avenue. This did not stop anywhere. It slowed a little near the town car, but that was all.

However, in the short time of its slowing, it discharged a passenger. Of the hundreds on the avenue, only a few no-

ticed the car, a big blue sedan. Of these few only two or three saw the passenger get out. At first, that was!

A prosaic street, crowded with prosaic people going about their commonplace affairs. . . .

And then, seemingly all at once, they began to stare at the discharged passenger. Once they had seen, they craned their necks to look again, shocked out of all commonplace living by what their eyes were regarding.

The person who had come from the blue sedan was a woman—a girl, rather, scarcely more than twenty. She was tall, maturely curved, strikingly lovely. She had dark hair and great dark eyes, and skin so fair that it looked snow-white in contrast to the blackness of her hair and eyes.

She had descended from the car, run a few paces to get her balance as she hit immovable ground from a moving object, and then stood still in the middle of the avenue, with surprised drivers jamming their brakes to keep from running her down.

For an instant she continued to stand there, in the middle of the street, as if dazed, with traffic a twin river around her. Then cars began to stop on each side of her, and cars and staring crowds began to ring her in.

"What's the matter with her?" a woman snapped. "Is she walking in her sleep?"

"Might be, at that," a man snickered



"A scream suddenly came from his distorted lips."

beside her. "Looks like she's got a nightie on."

Dazedly the beautiful girl looked around at the crowds. And it could be seen that the nightgown simile was not far from the mark.

Sheer strips of some stuff swathed her body, were draped loosely around her legs. That was all she wore, the sheer stuff through which her form could be vaguely seen as through mist.

"What is she—a veil dancer?" snorted another man.

**T**HE traffic cop from the corner began to force his way to the block-up in the center of the square. Like a statue swathed in mist the girl stood in the cleared space. And now the door of the town car opened and an elderly man stumbled out. His eyes were wide with horror. He staggered toward the girl, hands outstretched as though groping his way.

Suddenly the girl moved. She poised one slippered foot and from the folds of gauze that covered her she drew a short,

slim blade. Her voice raised in a shrill, eery incantation, the words of which could not be distinguished. She waved the sword. She began to dance.

"A publicity gag," someone shouted. "She's a sword-dancer after a newspaper write-up."

The crowd laughed and yelled agreement. Some fool began to beat time to the girl's slow, rhythmic steps by clapping his hands. But horror was growing on the face of the elderly man from the town car. And on the face of the cop, as he came nearer through the crowd, was amazement and something like awe.

"It's Jane Ivor," he panted suddenly. "By the saints—Jane Ivor!"

The dancing girl whirled more rapidly, more wildly. Her great dark eyes glittered with lurid fires. She performed her sword dance in the middle of the city's main street with more abandon.

"That's the girl," shouted the man who was clapping time. "If publicity's what you want, you'll get it."

The girl seemed not to hear him—seemed not to hear or see anybody. Her supple left hand tore at her breast, and a strip of the gray gauze enfolding her came loose and floated to the ground, exposing her smooth white shoulders.

"Now you're going to town!" laughed the man who clapped. "More, more!"

"Jane Ivor——" panted the traffic cop, tearing his way forward with ever less ceremony.

"My daughter!" groaned the elderly man from the town car, fighting the heedless mob between him and the girl.

The girl began to sing more wildly. And now the crowd stilled a bit as a few words could be distinguished in her chant, and as more and more of the swathing gauze was torn from her body. People began looking at one another inquiringly.

"Satan . . . my master . . ." some of

the words of the girl's chant sounded. "Devil . . . worship. . . ."

The swathing gauze was nearly all on the street now. And a woman cried out a bit as the meaning came home to all. No publicity-seeker would go quite so far. No girl would dare such censure in a mere quest for notoriety.

"Let me through, damn you!" shrieked the elderly man, fighting at the heedless ranks still between him and the girl.

"Get out of the way, you dumbbells," raged the cop, beginning to use his night stick. "Jane Ivor—let me get to her!"

There was stunned silence, in which the girl's chant sounded louder, more weird than ever. Then, like a concerted echo, the crowd repeated the name.

"Jane Ivor! *Jane Ivor!*"

A young man in the outer fringe of the crowd gasped.

"Good God! It *is* Jane Ivor! Most beautiful deb in the city! Daughter of John Ivor, the distilling magnate! Kidnapped a week ago, along with her kid brother! And now she comes back—like this!"

In the cleared spot on the avenue now danced a girl with midnight hair and eyes, who wore nothing but frayed, high-heeled slippers. Her eyes were frenzied as she waved the slim sword above her head and chanted. And now the words of the incantation were only too clear.

*"Satanic Majesty, I worship you. You, the Devil, are my master. Death to your enemies!"*

THE crowd, coming through heedless laughter and growing confusion to something like terror, gave back before the girl's shimmering blade. That sword was obviously razor-sharp, and she was slashing it around with horrifying abandon.

*"The Devil is my master! Death to his enemies!"*

The pirouetting white figure circled the ring of cars and people shutting it in. And then a man yelled.

"My God!—look at her eyes!"

The girl's black eyes seemed about to start from her head. Wild white formed a rim around the pupils.

"She's mad! Get her before she kills somebody!"

"*Satan is my master! I worship the Devil—*"

Screaming now, the crowd that had been laughing rolled back from the girl. The man who had been clapping time, ashen-faced, led the rush. Several other men, with the traffic cop beside them, leaped for her.

"*Back!*" she screamed, slashing with the sword. "*You are enemies of Satan! I will kill all enemies of the Devil!*"

"Jane," cried the elderly man, breaking at last through the milling crowd. "Jane—my own daughter——"

"*Back—I'll kill——*"

The elderly man, sobbing, gasping, fell back from the keen blade that had darted toward his heart.

"Jane—don't you know me? It's Dad!"

"*Back——*"

The traffic cop sprang at her. Like a tigress she stepped away, blade flashing. The cop's face turned sickly as the blade grazed his cheek. And then the others were on her, horrified, deathly afraid of the blade in her mad fingers, but risking their lives to catch the lovely maniac before others in the crowd died to the bite of the blade.

"*Enemies of the Devil! Enemies of the Devil!*"

Her shrill voice was a clarion call, a bugle note of madness. But they got her at last, hands gripping her white flesh firmly, though as compassionately as possible.

The elderly man approached her as she struggled in the grip of the men, who

tried to cover her writhing white body with their coats.

"Jane," he groaned. "Look at me, recognize me! It's John Ivor, your father, Jane."

The girl only glared at him out of great eyes in which the whites were lunatic rings around the pupils, and tried to gouge his face with taloned fingers.

"Jane Ivor! Released by the kidnappers—but insane!" the young man breathed. "Wait till I get *that* story into the paper! Insane heiress back from kidnap hell to do nude sword dance in the main street!"

He ran for a phone. And the knot of men holding Jane Ivor, once the city's most popular debutante, went with her to the town car which still stood beside the half-completed building, and put her in it with her white-faced father.

## 2. Satan's Threat

THE air was tense, still, in the best private room of Louisville's finest hospital.

Four people were in that room. One, tied with webbed linen to the iron bed, was Jane Ivor. The second was her father, who sat with fingers gripping the edge of his chair till they showed white in the reflected sun-glare from the cream-colored walls. The third was the chief of staff of the hospital, an internationally known psychiatrist. The fourth was a figure such as might have stepped out of a nightmare or a masquerade ball.

This figure was tall, spare. It was cloaked from head to heels in a red garment that enveloped it utterly. Over its face was a cloth mask, also red. On its hands were red rubber gloves, and hiding the head and hair was a red skull-cap from which projected two knobs in mockery of Lucifer's horns.

Keen eyes blazed through the eyeholes of the mask. Steel-gray eyes, icily calm.

The girl with the mad eyes writhed on the bed against the bonds. But her struggles were patently to get to the weird red figure, although in her eyes was stark horror of it.

"Satan," she whispered. "Master. I must serve you."

The figure uttered words which made the red mask move a bit over shrouded lips.

"Yes. I am Satan. And you must serve me. You hear?"

"I hear and I obey," whispered the girl.

"Jane——" faltered John Ivor, in a cracked voice.

The red-garbed figure held up a stern hand. The fingers of that hand seemed shielded in fresh blood as the sunlight caught the smooth red rubber of its glove.

John Ivor, Louisville's richest citizen, bit his lips for silence. The red mask moved with more words.

"You must serve me, even though, perhaps, I be not Satan after all."

For an instant the wildness in the girl's eyes faded a very little. Perplexity, fear, took its place.

"But you are Satan. You told me so, many times. And you told me I must serve you."

"That is true," the red-clad figure droned. "But I may have deceived you. Would it matter if I had deceived you?"

The girl said nothing for an instant. The light of perplexity was still stronger in her lovely eyes, still was robbing the light of madness that had originally showed there. And as it did so, the doctor and the father leaned tensely forward; for perplexity is a thing of sanity, not madness.

"Would it matter if I had deceived you, and was not Satan after all, but only a man?" the red-clad figure said.

The girl answered indirectly.

"You are Lucifer. You told me so.

And you told me I must obey you, and kill your enemies. . . ."

"I am sure it would make no difference to you if I were only a man, instead of Satan incarnate," said the masked lips smoothly.

"But you *are* Lucifer——"

It was almost a scream that came from the girl's lips. But, again, there was a subtle difference from that scream and the mad laughter that had come from her lips before.

"Watch," commanded the red-garbed one quietly.

He took off the red rubber gloves, revealing long-fingered hands that were almost inhumanly powerful, but which yet were indisputably human. He removed the skull-cap and mask from his face.

And that face, like the hands, was indisputably mortal. It was a strong face, with level gray eyes under coal-black brows; and with a high-bridged, patrician nose over a long, firm chin.

The girl half rose in spite of her bonds. Her eyes were wide and glazed as they glared at the revealed face. Her cheeks were white with nerve shock.

"You are a man," she whispered in a strangled voice. Then more loudly: "A man! You are only a man! Then I need not serve you! *Oh, God, you're not Lucifer, and you have no power——*"

Her words stopped as though cut with the sharp sword she had waved an hour before. She dropped back to the bed. The doctor rose quickly, and the father gasped.

"She has fainted," said the man in red quietly. "That is all. A tremendous nerve-shock, but she will be all right. And when she comes to, she will no longer be mad. The discovery, as far as she is concerned; that the dread master she thought she must serve is only mortal, will restore her sanity."

The doctor stared at him.

"I can almost believe you, Mr. Keane," he said slowly, "though when Miss Ivor was brought in here I would have sworn nothing could ever cure her madness. Who are you, that you know the mind so well, and know so well the exact thing to do to cure her?"

Ascott Keane shrugged powerful shoulders.

"It doesn't matter who I am." He turned to John Ivor. "We'll leave her here in good hands for a little while," he said. "Shall we go to your home?"

"Yes," breathed the father of the girl who had been mad. "Yes. Anything you say. You have saved my girl. Now, if you could only do something for my boy——"

"That's what we shall talk about," said Ascott Keane.

**I**N JOHN IVOR'S home on the boulevard, Keane and Ivor faced each other in a quiet library room. The phone had just rung, and word came from the hospital that Miss Ivor had regained consciousness and was indeed sane, though broken by some terrible experience she had gone through and of which she refused to speak. John Ivor's face was still pale, and his hands still trembled; but in his eyes there was a measure of relief.

"Thank God for your arrival!" he said brokenly. "If there is anything I can do to——"

Keane waved his hand.

"Forget that. I'm a wealthy man myself, perhaps richer than you are. Tell me everything about the kidnapping. I think I know most of it, but tell me anyway."

John Ivor sighed brokenly.

"It's hard to speak of it. A week ago today my daughter, Jane, and my son, Harold, started for the country club. Jane was going to play tennis with some friends, and Harold had a golfing engagement.

"They left—and did not come back.

"At six-thirty, an hour after they should have returned, I phoned the club. They had not gone there. No one had seen them, or knew anything about them. I wasn't too much worried, however, till my man came to me with a plain envelope and said there was a message in it left by some man who refused to wait for an answer.

"I opened the envelope and took out the message. It was the one that has been shown in the papers: an announcement that Harold and Jane had been kidnapped and were being held for ransom, the amount of which and place of delivery would be given later.

"I still wasn't sure the letter was anything but the grim prank of some moron, but then the police phoned that they had just found Jane's wrecked roadster. It was in the ditch. And in the car"—Ivor's voice cracked—"was a man's handkerchief saturated with chloroform, and my daughter's racket. With the racket were Harold's golf clubs.

"That night I got a note demanding that I pay one million dollars for the return of my boy and girl. I was to give the money at two in the afternoon, a week from that day, to a man who would receive it at a certain building under construction, where there would be no one on the sidewalk to try to stop him.

"I went to the police with everything. I knew it was risky, but so often kidnapers kill their victims anyway, and go on with their plans as if the victims were still alive, that I thought it more risky to keep the thing to myself."

Keane nodded.

"All as I have read for myself," he said. "Go on."

Ivor bit his lips.

"That much you have read. But there are two things you haven't read—which no one knows about yet.



"One is that I paid the ransom money today, just before my girl was pushed from the blue sedan. The other——"

Ivor mopped his forehead with a trembling hand.

"I didn't have a million in cash where I could get at it. That's a terrific sum, Mr. Keane. I could only get half a million. So I wrapped that up in newspaper, and gave it to the man who came to my town car for it.

"Half a million, Mr. Keane. And the kidnapers gave me back my daughter—*half of the pair they kidnapped!*"

He stared beseechingly, fearfully at Keane.

"No one knew I was going to pay only half the ransom. Yet they came in the sedan with only my girl—somehow knowing in advance that I hadn't the full sum with me!"

He paced the library, while Keane watched him.

"If that were all there was to it, I might think the return of half what I lost, in trade for half the sum demanded, was a coincidence. I might think that the kidnapers were playing the usual double-crossing game—expecting the full million but hoping to get still more by returning only my daughter. But there is more. I found this note in my pocket, thrust there by someone in the crowd, a little while after we'd got to the hospital."

He handed a crumpled bit of paper to Keane, who read:

John Ivor: When you deliver the other half-million, you shall get your son back. Meanwhile, your daughter's madness shall be your punishment for not giving the full sum in the first place.

The note was unsigned.

"**Y**OU see?" Ivor said almost pleadingly. "Days ago, the kidnapers knew I was going to give only half the ransom, though not a soul on earth but myself knew that!" He jerked around. "Have you any explanation for that?"

Keane's long fingers touched softly.

"An excellent one," he said. "You wouldn't understand, however. All I will say is that it only confirms my knowledge of the kidnapper."

Ivor gasped. "You know who he is?"

Keane nodded.

"Then—my God, man!—the police——"

"Can do nothing, if it's the person I think it is. Think! *Know!* The kidnapper is Doctor Satan himself. The huge sum asked made me think so in the first place, which is why I came to Louisville from New York when I first read of the affair. The diabolically induced madness was another indication. 'The Devil is my master. I serve Satan.' I knew who had inspired *that* delusion, all right! Now, the apparent magic by which the kidnapper knew you were going to pay only half the demand. Doctor Satan read your mind, my friend."

"Doctor Satan?"

"So the name means nothing to you! I wish it didn't to me." Keane sighed wearily. "He is a man who performs crime for the sheer, icy love of it—a devil if ever there was one. Your daughter in her delusion about having been in contact with Satan himself, was not so far wrong, my friend!"

He strode toward the door.

"Don't tell the police or anyone else my name or my connection with this," he warned. "I want to work alone. Give me twenty-four hours to try to track this man down and rescue your boy."

He nodded and was gone; a man, Ivor thought, like a steel blade; a man to inspire hope when all hope was lost, as he had inspired it in that bizarre and still inexplicable cure of Jane Ivor. . . .

"**B**UT of course it was apparent at once what had happened," said Keane a few minutes later.

He was talking to a tall, lovely girl with deep blue eyes and reddish hair, in her hotel suite. The girl was Beatrice Dale, secretary, companion, right-hand man.

"Knowing that Doctor Satan was behind this, we could guess at the source of the girl's madness. Doctor Satan was seen by her only in his crimson costume, of course. In that costume he subtly and deliberately induced madness in her. Therefore, her cure suggested itself: Dress as Satan did, and unmask before her, letting her see that the being she thought the Devil incarnate was only a man after all."

Beatrice was frowning a little. She nodded impatiently.

"Yes, I see how the cure would suggest itself. But why did Doctor Satan drive her mad in the first place?"

Keane sighed. "It was in line with his usual process: A reign of terror among wealthy citizens—then demands for money. Satan kidnapped Jane and Harold Ivor intending from the first to send them back to society incurably and horribly mad. With that as a precedent, no other father would hesitate a minute to part with a fortune to spare madness in his own child!"

Keane's icily calm gray eyes grew colder yet with bitter anger.

"No one knows it yet, including the police—but eight rich men in the city have received notes from Doctor Satan. Each note demands a sum varying from two hundred thousand to five hundred thousand dollars. Each note threatens kidnapping and induced insanity for the child of that man if the money is not paid on demand! Jane and Harold Ivor are but the first of many victims—if we can't stop that red-robed devil!"

Beatrice Dale faced him, cheeks a little pale, a light in her eyes that Keane had never yet really observed,

"So again you go after this man," she murmured. "Ascott, be careful. I feel—this time—that you may not come back——"

Keane's rare smile flashed out.

"Save your sympathies for Satan, Beatrice. This time *he* will be killed, and our work completed!"

### 3. Road to Hell

AT TEN o'clock of the night when Jane Ivor had amazed and then horrified Louisville by doing her mad dance in the open street, a tall man in an enveloping topcoat approached the unfinished building where Ivor had delivered half a million dollars from his town car.

The man had his coat buttoned and the rim of his hat down over his face, though the night was warm. He carried a bundle under his arm.

At the building, on the deserted walk, the man paused. Light from across the street shone on his ice-gray eyes for an instant. Ascott Keane.

Across the street were many people. Before the building there were none. Back from the empty sidewalk yawned the cavernous entrance of the brick shell.

Steps sounded from down the walk. Keane tensed a little and looked at his watch. It was three minutes after ten. In his pocket was a note—one of the eight extortion notes sent to the city's eight leading citizens. The note read:

If you do not want your son kidnapped and returned a hopeless lunatic, you will deliver four hundred thousand dollars at five minutes after ten tonight at the address given below.

The given address was that of the unfinished building. The signer of the note was Doctor Satan.

Four minutes after ten. The approaching footsteps, slow, leisurely, came yet closer. Keane looked toward them.

For an instant Keane was startled and disappointed. For the maker of the steps

was a uniformed policeman. He had expected anything but that; had expected an accomplice of Satan, perhaps disguised as a tramp, perhaps dressed as a sleek and respectable citizen. . . .

"Disguise," breathed Keane. "But that doesn't necessarily mean as tramp or business man. . . ."

Eyes wide with the thought, he stared harder at the approaching policeman. And then his eyes narrowed and his jaw tensed.

The policeman's eyes were glazed, drugged-looking. He was walking like something moved by a spring—or like a person moving in his sleep. His wide, staring eyes were fixed on Keane as though they didn't really see him.

"My God!" whispered Keane, as the full extent of Doctor Satan's scheme burst home to him. "He's using the police as his messengers now! This man is hypnotized—perhaps drugged first! But what more efficient way of collecting extortion money could be devised than to have a patrolman in full uniform, apparently only walking his beat, pick it up?"

The policeman came nearer, glazed eyes fixed on Keane's face. He slowed as he got to Keane, as if waiting for something.

Keane extended the bundle he carried.

"Have you come here for this?" he said, staring at the man's drugged, vacant eyes.

"Perhaps," the policeman spoke. His voice was thick and pitched in a monotone. "What is in the package?"

"That which will keep Malcolm Tibet's boy from sharing the fate of Jane Ivor," said Keane.

"The word?" said the patrolman.

Keane was staring into those drugged eyes with all the power of his will, now. And, as a result of his concentrated gaze, those eyes were flickering a bit.

"The word is 'immunity'," he said, quoting the password given in the letter.

For a moment the policeman hesitated. And Keane knew that his brain was struggling to catch the message of the master mind that had hypnotized him. Where was that message coming from? Keane had to find out, and do it through this man.

"'Immunity' is the correct word," the man said monotonously. "Give me the package. . . ."

His voice trailed off as Keane continued to stare at him, hypnotically, powerfully. His eyes widened and grew perplexed. Slowly but surely Keane's brain was hammering down the wall of hypnosis induced by Doctor Satan previously. But there was going to be a bad moment, Keane realized, when the man was free of Satan's spell and not entirely under his own!

"The package——" the policeman reiterated vaguely. And then his eyes, clearing more and more, blinked as he stared around him, for an instant in full possession of his faculties.

"Hey, what the hell! What am I doing here? Who are you? What's this package you got?"

He stepped a swift pace back from Keane, hand driving for his gun.

"This is the joint where Ivor was to have handed over the kidnap dough! Now you're here with a bundle! *By God, you must be one of the guys——*"

**H**IS gun was half drawn before Keane's eyes completed their work. He stood rigidly still in that attitude, gun half out of its holster, face hostile, staring at Keane.

Keane spoke.

"You will do what I command," he said.

The man's breathing had become regular again. His eyes were glazed once

more; but not, this time, from the hypnosis of Doctor Satan!

"I will do what you command."

"You were sent here for this package. Who sent you?"

"A man in red, with a red mask."

"Where did you meet him?"

"He was in a blue sedan. He stepped out of it as I came near. He looked at me a long time, and then told me what to do."

"Where were you to deliver the bundle you got from the man who brought it to this building?"

"To the blue sedan, at the same corner."

He named an intersection toward the eastern limit of the town. Keane's fists clenched. Would Doctor Satan be in that sedan again? If so, he was going to meet him in less than fifteen minutes! And *this* time——

Keane felt of a small, egg-shaped thing he carried gingerly in his coat pocket. Bullets, knife-blades, clubs—these ordinarily lethal weapons could not be used on Doctor Satan. He had means of protecting himself against such crude weapons. But this thing he had in his pocket! That, Keane thought, spelled death for the man!

"We'll go to the blue sedan," he said to the patrolman. "My car is down a block. Come with me to it."

**A** DARK intersection, with an abandoned factory on one corner throwing black shadow. In the shadow, a blue sedan—the car from which Jane Ivor had been pushed that afternoon.

Keane gripped the egg-shaped thing in his pocket. Then he cursed in his heart as he drew near the sedan with the cop. For there was only one person in the car, and that one was a man on whose face was stupid cruelty, who sat at the steering-wheel.

Doctor Satan himself had not come; he

had merely sent a casual accomplice to get the money. Keane's quest of the red-garbed devil who engaged in crime for the love of it as some men hunt big game in Africa, was not to be so easily ended.

The man at the wheel of the sedan eyed the two doubtfully as they drew near. Obviously he had been expecting only the uniformed patrolman; his fingers clutched the gear-shift lever uncertainly when he saw Keane too. But he waited till Keane had got to the car. And that was his mistake.

Keane's eyes bored into his as they had drilled into the cop's. The man blinked uneasily, tried to turn his head as instinct warned him of some danger he could not understand.

"You were to receive a package from this man," said Keane, indicating the policeman. His voice was level, quiet, soothing.

"Yeah," said the driver of the sedan. "But where do you come in?"

"I'm the one who took it to the building. I'm to go with you to your master with it."

The man's lips tightened.

"Oh, no, you're not. You——"

He stopped. His eyes were helplessly held by Keane's.

"You can't——" he mumbled.

His face became stony, his eyes unwinking. Keane got into the car beside him. Then he turned to the policeman, and made a pass with his hand before the other's heavy face.

"Drive!" he snapped to the man at the wheel.

The command was given none too soon. With the passing of Keane's hand across his face, the cop came out of his trance. He saw Keane, really, instead of through a hypnotic mist. He remembered seeing him before, in connection with some suspicious place or happening that he couldn't quite spot at the moment.

"Halt!" he roared, as the car jumped forward.

"Faster," said Keane to the staring driver.

Gun shots sounded from behind. The policeman was trying to shoot the tires of the blue sedan. But they left him behind and sped on, toward the city limits.

"You will drive me to your master," Keane said to the man he had enslaved momentarily to his will.

"I will drive you to my master," the man repeated.

**T**HIRTY miles they went, from the limits of Louisville. They got to a farmhouse that was a tumbledown ruin. Behind it there was a barn, in even worse shape.

The man turned into the drive of the vacant place. He got out of the car. Keane followed. The man went into the barn.

There he walked directly to a mound of hay. There was a bit of wood at the edge of the mound. The man grasped this and pulled it. The hay mound turned, as though resting on a turntable. A square hole was revealed in the barn floor with steps leading down.

"Where does this go?" demanded Keane.

"It strikes a short tunnel that leads into a cave. I don't know where the cave ends. I think it is a far part of the Mammoth Cave system. Anyhow, I know it goes for a long, long way. And somewhere back in it, my master, Doctor Satan, stays."

Keane took a deep breath. He had trailed Satan to many different lairs, but none of them promised to be as appropriate as this. It was fitting that a man masquerading as Lucifer should have his haunt in the bowels of the earth—near Hell, if there were such a place.

The man who had driven him walked

down the steps. He touched a projecting stone. The hay mound above slid into place, leaving them in thick darkness.

"Now?" said Keane.

The man pointed. Keane felt his arm go up, looked in the direction of its extended finger. Far ahead, he saw a pin-prick of light.

He turned to the man.

"You will sleep," he said quietly, his hand on the man's arm.

"I will sleep," was the somnolent answer.

Keane felt the man lowering himself to the rock floor of the crude tunnel they were in. He felt him lie down, heard no further movement. Alone, he started toward the pin-prick of light far in the distance—and toward whatever weird place Doctor Satan had fixed down here as his lair.

"A lair near Hell," Keane muttered as he felt his way along toward the distant light. "Please God I can send you to Hell tonight."

#### 4. *Hell's Anteroom*

**T**HE tunnel down which Keane walked grew constantly lighter. As it lightened, it turned faint rose-colored from the oddity of the light ahead. And now Keane heard a faint roaring from that same light.

He got nearer, and saw that the light across the tunnel ahead of him was not constant; it flickered and twisted, like a great yellow serpent.

Then he saw the nature of it.

Up from the rock floor roared a column of flame at least two yards across. It disappeared through an orifice in the rock ceiling, stretching from floor to top like a solid column, save that it twisted and writhed constantly like the fiery serpent it resembled.

Keane stopped. The rock beneath him

was trembling with the fury of the pillar of fire. The heat blasted at his face twenty feet away. It was a door to what lay beyond the tunnel more forbidding than any portal of steel.

"Natural gas," he muttered.

But a guess as to the nature of the column did not help him pass it. That stopped him, for the moment. But, he reflected, there must be a way to tame the pillar. People passed along here. They couldn't do that if the flame persisted constantly.

He thought of going back and getting as guide the man he had left in hypnotic slumber at the tunnel mouth. But that was not necessary. Even as he thought that, he heard the roar of the pillar diminish a little, felt the rock shake less violently under his feet.

The fiery column was dying down. It burned less brightly as he watched it. It sank till he could see the leaping crest of its top under the low ceiling.

And over that crest he saw a man's head, on the other side. It was a head to induce nightmares. Like a naked skull it was, with unbelievably little flesh to clothe it. In deep eye-sockets, drugged eyes peered forth.

The flame died down still lower. Keane saw the man's body, as skeletal as the head. And as the emaciated body was more and more revealed by the subsiding of the flames, Keane shrank back into a niche in the wall to be out of sight. He opened the bundle he had brought with him.

From the bundle he took the costume he had worn in the hospital to restore Jane Ivor's sanity; red cloak, red mask, red skull-cap, red gloves—point for point a costume matching Doctor Satan's own as Keane remembered it from former encounters.

He donned cloak and gloves, started to put on the mask.

But by now the pillar of fire had sunk below the floor level, down into the hole from which it sprang. It left only a ragged orifice like the mouth of a well in the rock floor. The opening was only about six feet across. Keane, looking around the corner of his small alcove, saw the emaciated man with the drugged, staring eyes, leap this hole and start walking down the tunnel toward where he hid.

There was no time to don the mask and skull-cap. The man was abreast of the niche before Keane could get them on. He stared at Keane in the lessened light of the lowered flame. His mouth opened for a shout.

Keane felled him with a blow to the jaw. There was neither time nor need for subtler measures. He caught the falling, thin body and lowered it to the floor just out of the way of the tunnel itself. Then he put on the mask and the skull-cap with the two projecting knobs in mocking imitation of Satan's horns.

Tall and spare, with the red robe arrogantly draped over his broad shoulders, he stalked toward the hole into which the flame had sunk—an exact replica of Doctor Satan himself. Already the roar of the fiery pillar was increasing again, and he saw the tip of the flames as it started to rise once more to bar the tunnel.

He leaped the two-yard opening. Heat seared him for an instant, threatened to set fire to his robes even in the half-second of his jump. But he got to the other side. . . .

Behind him the fire column rose to the ceiling in its full strength. His way back was cut off. Before him——

Keane looked, and gasped aloud.

He was in a great, low cave, extending before him farther than the eyes could penetrate. Stalagmites, like withered, warped bodies, thrust up from the floor. Stalactites dripped from the low ceiling.

Among the stalagmites half a dozen figures moved; figures no less warped and distorted than the limestone pillars around them.

Keane's eyes narrowed as he looked at them. He had guessed that Doctor Satan had more accomplices here than he normally used in his devilish business; the layout of the place had indicated that. But he had not reckoned on so many, and he had not dwelt on the possible caliber of the accomplices.

Doctor Satan must have scoured the underworld to get these men who were smoothing the floor of the cave, storing supplies, in general working to make of it a permanent and sumptuous base for their diabolical master. Keane had never seen such seamed, degenerate, evil countenances! Why, with the red light from the flame pillar flickering over the weird cavern, and over their twisted bodies, they looked like demons in a real Hell!

Now two of them glanced toward him, and shouted aloud. They straightened, and the others straightened with them. At attention, like ghouls parading before the Devil himself, they waited the orders and coming of the one dressed in Lucifer's red robe.

**A**RROGANTLY, imitating Doctor Satan's stride, Keane went toward them. And he saw again, in every eye, the glazed look he had seen in the eyes of the policeman and the man who looked like a walking skeleton. Doctor Satan was taking no chances of disaffection or insubordination among the rabble he had chosen to set his evil underground house in order. He had made each of them a slave to his hypnotic will.

"Somewhere back in . . . the cave system . . . my master, Doctor Satan, stays."

So had said the man Keane had come to the caves with. Keane, not glancing at the murderous-looking men who stood

at attention, stalked past them and toward the far end of the big cave. But as he went, his mind wrestled with a thought as breath-taking as it was monstrous.

So much like a real Hell, this place looked! So much like actual, inhuman demons appeared the dregs of criminal humanity working in it!

Doctor Satan masqueraded as Satan. Yes, but was it all masquerade? Was it not conceivable that—Lucifer being only a personification and title for the evil passions of men—Doctor Satan was *actually* Lucifer, or as near to it as a being could ever be?

Keane shrugged the thought aside. True or fanciful, it was beside the point; the point being the destruction of the master criminal who had given rise to it.

He got to the end of the big cave at last, and squeezed through a rock opening barely large enough to admit his lean but powerful body, into another smaller cave. And with his entrance into this he instantly leaped sideways and behind a big stalagmite. For in this second cave was everything he had come here to find.

Tensely, cautiously, he peered around the concealing rock cone. . . .

**T**O ONE side of the cave, which was roughly circular and about fifty feet in diameter, was a legless giant who supported his torso on muscular arms as big as most men's thighs. The man's stupid, cruel eyes blinked toward the center of the cave. This was Bostiff, Satan's main lieutenant in crime since Keane had blasted his other lieutenant, Girse, out of existence. He was looking at two figures in the center of the place.

One of these was a boy of nineteen or so, dressed in expensive clothes which were now wrinkled and stained. The boy's face expressed terror beyond that tolerable to sanity. His wild eyes glared at the figure that faced him with the

fascination in them expressed in the eyes of a small animal hypnotized by a snake.

And this other figure was that of Doctor Satan himself.

Tall and arrogant it towered over the boy, who was Harold Ivor, brother of the girl who had been left, a maniac, on the main street of Louisville. It was garbed in red from head to foot and, point for point, was as like the red-clad figure of Keane, concealed behind the stalagmite, as a reflection of that figure in a mirror.

Only in one detail did the two identical figures differ. The eyes peering through the holes in the mask covering Keane's face were steel-gray. The eyes of the figure towering over the boy were black, lurid, infernal.

"Who am I?" Doctor Satan rasped to the boy.

Harold Ivor, panting, glaring helplessly into the arrogant black eyes, replied: "You are Lucifer."

"You truly believe that?"

"I truly believe that."

Keane, behind his concealing pillar, felt glacial rage flood through him. He had got here just in time to witness Doctor Satan's method of driving his victims mad. He had turned Jane Ivor into a maniac. Now he was doing the same to Harold Ivor. Then the boy would be released in the town as Jane had been—a second horrible object-lesson as to what happened to the children of the rich if their parents did not pay to prevent it.

"Whom do you serve?" rasped Doctor Satan to the lad.

"I serve you, Satanic Majesty. And I will kill your enemies."

There was a silence, while the black eyes of the masked figure stared into the glazed, mad eyes of the boy.

"Bostiff," Doctor Satan said.

The legless giant swung his body toward his master, using the calloused backs of his hands as feet,

"Take him to his prison. Another session like this and he will be ready for release."

"Yes, master."

Bostiff seized the boy's hand, propelled him toward an opening in the cave. He dragged himself after. The two went through the opening.

The red-robed figure in the center of the cave was alone. The red-robed figure behind the stalagmite near the door, drew up to its full height, then stepped out of its place of concealment.

Doctor Satan had been staring at the opening through which Bostiff had gone with Harold Ivor. Now he whirled like an uncoiling spring, and stared at Keane. And in his black eyes was a sudden madness of surprize, hate and rage.

Keane drew near him. He stood before Satan, and the result was fantastic.

Two Satans stood there; two Lucifers, clad in red, red-masked, with Luciferian horns. The Devil and his double! Crimson twins, with death in the eyes of each.

Then Doctor Satan stepped toward Keane with right hand clenched.

"Keane!" he grated. "Again! At every turn I find you—squarely in my path! But this time that path shall lead ahead without obstacles, to limitless power."

"No," said Keane softly, "this time the path shall be blocked, if my dead body must be used to block it!"

### 5. *The Scarlet Twain*

DOCTOR SATAN took a step nearer the figure so closely resembling his own. His black eyes played sardonically over Keane's red cloak.

"So," he grated, "in order to get past my men you imitated my trappings. You made a mockery of the masquerade it amuses me to wear."

Keane shrugged.

"It seemed the easiest way. I was sure



you had many serving you here. I didn't want to kill them. It seemed easier to get past them by trickery."

"And having passed them," said Doctor Satan, "what then?"

Keane's mask stirred to the deep breath he drew.

"This," he said softly. "A thing I think even you are unfamiliar with, Doctor Satan. You will learn of it shortly. And it will be the last thing you ever will learn about!"

His hand went under the red cloak. It came out of his pocket with the weapon he had carried from the hotel—his one weapon, on which he was staking everything.

He opened his fingers and let Doctor Satan see the egg-shaped thing lying on his palm. It was smooth, perhaps two and a half inches long by two inches through. It seemed to be made of gray vitrum.

"Long ago," Keane said, "there were inquiring minds more versed in their own science than our present-day scientists, with their research laboratories and fine equipment, are in theirs. That was the science of Black Art. This is one of the results. I found it in the ruins of a Druid monastery in England."

Doctor Satan stared at the thing in Keane's hand. And as he stared, his black eyes lost their arrogance and became filled with the shadow of dawning fear.

"Where did you . . . get your knowledge of what this is?" he breathed, voice thick. "Why, it is . . . it is the——"

He stopped, and a silence like that of the grave held the cavern.

"It is the Blue Death of Saint Sartius," said Keane. "It was first used in Rome. Then its secret was forgotten till the black ages, when a Druid monk rediscovered it. I have read records of the death of everyone in a certain town in England. The records stated that an odd sort of plague was responsible, but intimated

that death was caused by some of these."

His fingers clenched over the vitreous shell.

"Sarlfolk," whispered Doctor Satan hoarsely. In his black eyes was a fear he had never shown before. "I have read the records, too. The town of Sarlfolk—depopulated overnight and never occupied again—But that can't be the Blue Death you hold in your hand! Its secret was again lost when England was still a wilderness with men like animals populating it."

Keane's masked lips moved in a bleak smile. He raised the egg-shaped thing in his hand.

"You'll find out," he said.

And he threw the thing with all his force at the feet of Doctor Satan!

**S**ATAN screamed. It was the first scream of terror that had ever come from the shielded, perpetually hidden lips. He leaped back from the object that had burst like a tiny bomb save that no explosion accompanied it. But quick as he was, he had acted too late.

Keane had thrown it so that it burst to pieces between him and the only two openings from the cave—the one into which Bostiff had taken Harold Ivor, and the one through which Keane had come. And with the instant of its bursting, the vitreous egg had emitted that which rose as a barrier to those exits.

From the broken shell a bluish, heavy mist rose rapidly and moved toward Satan as though acting with a will and intelligence of its own.

Another scream tore from Satan's shielded lips. He was probably the only man on earth, aside from Keane, versed enough in the occult to know what terror it was that crawled toward him. But he knew well enough!

The bluish mist spread with the rapidity of flame devouring straw. It poured

from the broken shell like a rolling wall. And it formed in a half-circle around Satan, forcing him back toward the rock wall of the cavern.

In Keane's eyes was the glitter of triumph long delayed.

"You'll know now some of the anguish you've caused others," he said savagely. "You'll know some of the torment endured by the men you've killed—some of the mental torture being undergone at this moment by the parents of the children you've threatened. I could feel sorry for anyone facing the Blue Death of Saint Sartius, but not for you."

There was a shuffling sound at the entrance through which Bostiff and Harold Ivor had gone. Bostiff had reappeared. He swayed in the doorway, eyes glinting with brute surprize as he saw two red-robed figures where only one had been before, and with fear as he saw without understanding the blue fog that was rolling toward the one he recognized instinctively as his master.

"To me!" Doctor Satan screamed. "Bostiff——"

The legless giant turned, snarling, toward Keane. Then he turned back obediently toward Satan and began hitching his body toward the blue fog on his hands.

"No!" breathed Keane in something like horror as the legless man hitched forward. But he did not utter the word aloud. Bostiff was as evil as his master, limited only by his own thick-wittedness. He deserved death as well as Satan.

Bostiff reached the edge of the blue fog, paused, then groped a little into it.

A scream suddenly came from his distorted lips. And the fog, touching him, underwent an instant change.

From being a sort of mist, it became a clinging, viscous shroud. Bostiff began wrenching and tearing at it as it poured itself swiftly over and around him. The viscous shroud grew more opaque, palpa-

bly harder. It was as though the legless man were suddenly encased in frosted blue glass.

His hoarse shouts died in volume. Through the blue opacity his staring eyes, like the eyes of a man caught under ice and swimming desperately under water to find the hole he fell through, peered out.

"Master! Save me!"

The shout could barely be heard. And in any event Doctor Satan wasn't listening. Nor could he have done anything if he had.

The blue mist had reached him now. It circled him closer as he crouched against the rock wall as though trying to force his body into it. It touched his face. . . .

Doctor Satan's hands were up, fingers extended in a cabalistic sign. His lips were moving the red mask over his face as they chanted a ritual not heard by human ears for fifty generations.

And as he watched, perspiration studded Keane's face under his mask. The blue fog was slowing a little. Was it possible that Satan could evade *this* death?

But the fog, halting for a moment with the cabalistic signs and the incantation, surged forward again. Incredibly, the mist-like stuff grew what seemed to be horrible tentacles. The shreds of them wrapped around Satan's red-sheathed arms and dragged them down.

A few yards away, Bostiff was now only a cocoon of a thing lying moveless on the floor. Even his ghastly, staring eyes could not now be seen. The fog portion that had wrapped around him had hardened like the vitrum of which the shell of the egg-like object containing it had been made. Keane repressed a little shudder. Such a fearful death! . . .

Doctor Satan was down now. Over him, as it had over the legless man, the blue mist was becoming a viscous, sticky sheath. But Satan had stopped screaming.

Keane saw his black eyes glisten through the mask with fearful intensity of thought.

Next moment Keane found out what the thought had been directed at.

A man stepped through the narrow portal into the first cave off the flame. Another man followed, and another. Six men lined before the opening and began to advance on Keane. Slaves of Satan's hypnotic will, they had been called silently, from this distance.

**K**EANE exclaimed aloud, though not in fear of his own safety; the summoning of these comparatively stupid mortals was a futile last gesture, as Satan must have known in his extremity. The thought that wrenched the cry from Keane's lips was the fear that by sheer numbers the men might defeat the death he had brought here for the red-robed fiend he had struggled against so long.

The Blue Death could surround and kill only a limited number of bodies! True enough, the ancient records hinted that the Blue Death had killed all the inhabitants of the old town of Sarfolk. But if that were so, a great deal more of it must have been released than had been carried here in Keane's egg!

The deadly blue mist would attack every moving thing within range save the being that directed it! But it took a definite amount of it to kill. It now surrounded two forms. If it divided to surround six more—would there be enough to kill them all?

For once in his life, Keane wished he had a gun. In his deadly resolve to overcome Doctor Satan at all costs, he would have shot these men, because their dead bodies would not have drawn aside any of the fatal mist. But he had no gun, and he could not attack six men bare-handed. Biting his lips, he could only watch what took place.

Meanwhile, the six men, hypnotized by Doctor Satan and acting blindly according to his will, sprang at Keane. With an athlete's quickness, he dodged their concerted rush. Two of them plunged into the Blue Death, already rolling toward them. One, laying hands for an instant on Keane, he flung into the ominous fog. The other three started to attack a second time, and stopped like ice-sheathed statues as the Blue Death reached them.

Keane's breath came between his clenched teeth in a ragged hiss. Eight bodies were cased in the viscous blue stuff which the mist became when it touched flesh! They lay like cocoons on the rock floor, some motionless, some feebly writhing, but all things of horror and despair.

Keane went to the form which still showed a little reddish through the blue crust over it—the form of Doctor Satan.

Terror-filled, dulling black eyes stared at him through the fearful sheath. Red-gloved hands raised a little, crackling the blue stuff that cased them, in a final gesture of malediction. Then they fell and the black eyes closed.

"Thank God!" breathed Keane, voice harsh and cracked.

The fight was over. He was sure. To make doubly sure, he would have liked to strangle that stark form; to have clubbed its head in. But he dared not touch the blue shell. That would have meant death for him, though he himself had released it.

He went to the opening through which he had seen Harold Ivor taken. The boy was beyond, in a small cave like a prison room. He was cowering against the wall, and he shrieked and threw up his hands as Keane entered in his red masquerade.

Keane dragged off his mask, and threw back his red hood. The boy stared as Jane Ivor had stared.

"You're—you're a man?" he sobbed. "You're not——"

Keane smiled, and in that smile was a gentleness that erased the fear from the boy's face.

"I am not Satan," he said. "There is no Satan—at least, none to frighten you any more."

As Jane Ivor had done, her brother, Harold, swayed in the beginning of a fainting fit from shock. But he had not been as far driven in madness, yet, as his sister had been. He reeled from the shock, but he did not lapse into unconsciousness. And after a moment he came to Keane, trembling hand outstretched.

Keane grasped it.

"Come," he said. "We'll leave here. We'll leave this Hell, and the demons in it, and its master—all dead——"

But then, as he got to the door, a hoarse shout was wrung from his lips. He leaped to the spot where Doctor Satan had been lying, eyes wide with a shock of astonishment that almost unnerved him.

The spot where Doctor Satan had lain was empty. His blue-sheathed form was no longer there. And over the bodies of the seven who had served him, the blue casing was a little thicker.

"Damn him," raged Keane, trembling fists raised. "*Damn him!*"

Satan had gathered the remnants of that icy, terrific will of his while Keane was away with the boy, and had, out of his own fragmentary knowledge of Saint Sartius' Blue Death, contrived somehow to divert its hardening shell from his own body and onto the others that lay near by.

That was obviously what had happened. But, sick with defeat when victory had been tasted, Keane refused entirely to believe it till he got to the anteroom cavern with Harold Ivor.

THE flaming pillar was down. Someone had just passed this way and had hurled the well-mouth opening from which the fire hissed.

Had that someone hurled it feebly, barely dragging his body up the opposite edge? Keane thought so. For on the far edge of the small abyss was a single, torn, red glove.

But, feebly or not, Doctor Satan had escaped from the caves. Again he had cheated the death to which Keane had driven him closer than he had ever been before in his satanic existence.

The flame pillar was already rising again.

"You must jump that hole," Keane said to the boy.

He set the example. The youth followed. Clinging to Keane's hand, Harold Ivor went with him down the outer tunnel.

The concealed trap-door above was open, as Satan had left it, too hard-pressed and weak to bother to shut it after him. Under the door the man Keane had hypnotized after his use as guide had been no longer needed, lay stretched on the floor. Eyes open and blank, he slept the sleep from which there is no awakening save by the action of the one who induces that sleep.

Keane started toward the man, then stopped. He was a human rat. The emanations from his hazed mind caught by Keane's superhuman psychic perception whispered that he was at least once a murderer, perhaps twice or thrice.

Face bleak, Keane went on past him with the shuddering boy. He left the man sleeping there. . . .

Outside, in the driveway of the abandoned farm, the blue sedan was gone. Keane bit his lips as he visioned the swaying, raging figure in red at its wheel,

speeding off somewhere into the night—  
to strike at humanity again when he had  
recovered.

Somberly, with his shoulders drooping,

Keane started toward town with the boy.  
He had stopped the reign of terror in  
Louisville—but his real work was not  
yet done.