

MARCH

STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY

AND TERROR

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A
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MAGAZINE



THE DUEL
OF THE
SORCERERS
BY PAUL ERNST

STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY AND TERROR

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The Duel of the Sorcerers

A Complete Novelette

By Paul Ernst

It is magic in the dark—sorcerer
against sorcerer—master against
his hell-bound pupil.

CHAPTER I

Mark of the Fang

RICK BALLARD gazed once again at the tiny inflamed marks on the throat of the unconscious girl. His face, drawn with worry over this mysterious illness that had attacked her, had grown even more pallid at the words of Tholl.

"But, Professor!" he exclaimed. "What you say is impossible. Impossible! No one but a superstitious child could believe in such things."

Professor Tholl shook his head impatiently. It was a noble head. White hair, cut long, cascaded down almost to his collar; his white beard suggested wisdom and venerability. A large, strong nose rose incisively over firm lips and chin. His eyes were gray, cool and piercing.

"If it is not that—what is it?"

Rick Ballard gnawed at his lip in perplexity.

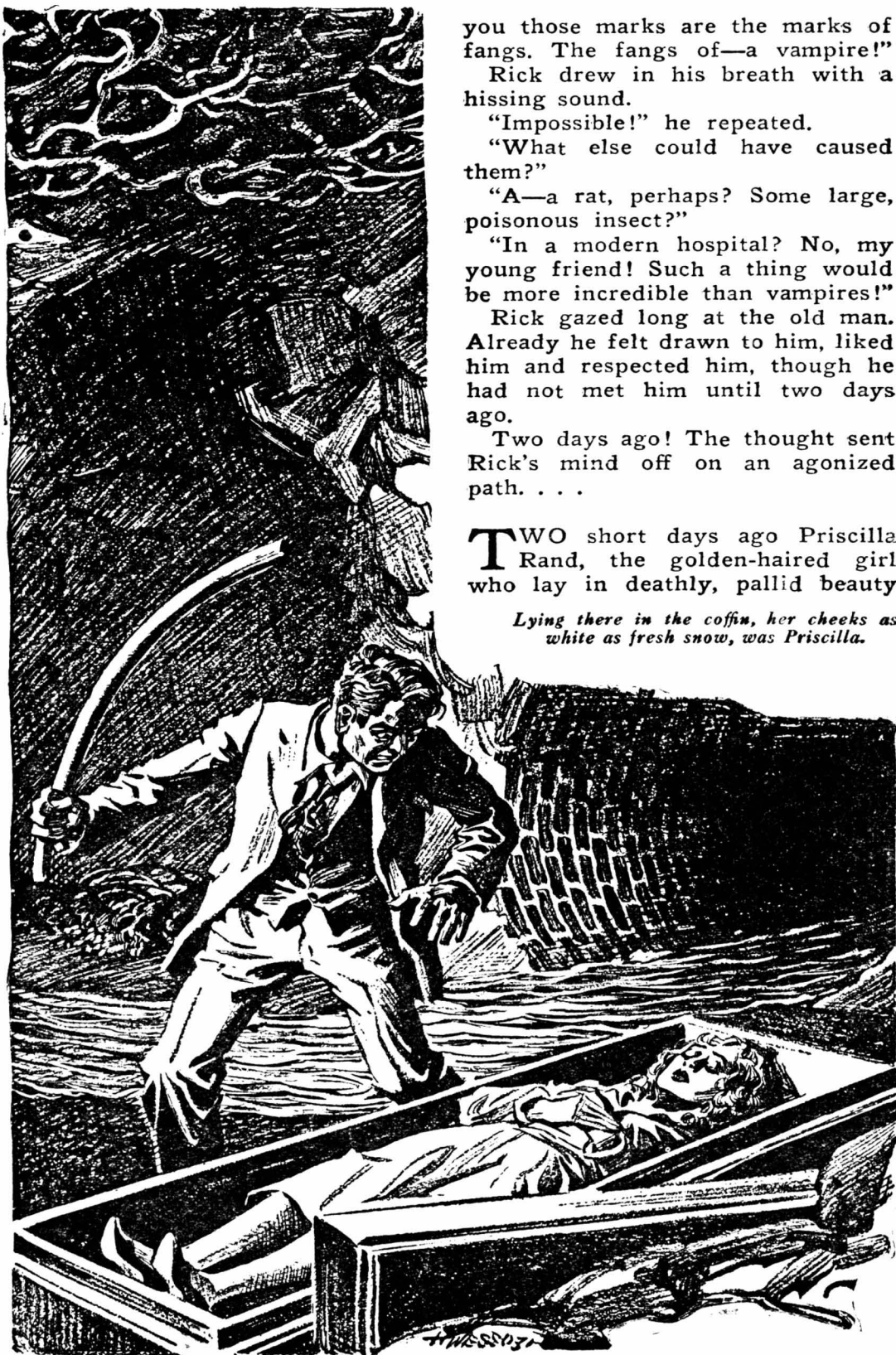
"How should I know? Even the doctors couldn't tell."

The combined night staff of the hospital had just left the room, after having bent over the girl who lay like a pale statue in her trance-



like state, and studied those inflamed little marks on her throat with the grave profundity of ignorance. No two of the doctors had arrived at the same conclusion regarding the cause of the punctures.

"Of course they couldn't tell," said Professor Tholl. "But I can, although I wouldn't dream of declaring the truth to such advanced—scientists." His firm lips moved with a trace of contempt. "I tell



you those marks are the marks of fangs. The fangs of—a vampire!”

Rick drew in his breath with a hissing sound.

“Impossible!” he repeated.

“What else could have caused them?”

“A—a rat, perhaps? Some large, poisonous insect?”

“In a modern hospital? No, my young friend! Such a thing would be more incredible than vampires!”

Rick gazed long at the old man. Already he felt drawn to him, liked him and respected him, though he had not met him until two days ago.

Two days ago! The thought sent Rick’s mind off on an agonized path. . . .

TWO short days ago Priscilla Rand, the golden-haired girl who lay in deathly, pallid beauty

Lying there in the coffin, her cheeks as white as fresh snow, was Priscilla.

on the narrow bed, had been normal and healthy. Rick Ballard and she had been an average young engaged couple, who were to be married as soon as his finances permitted. No cloud showed on their sky.

Then, two evenings ago, Rick had called at her home at eight-thirty, to find chaos there and to see the Rand family physician examining an unconscious girl, and to hear him admitting that he did not know what was wrong with her. All he could discover were the two marks on her throat—the marks that appeared to have been produced by some sharp-toothed, rodent thing.

There had followed a trip to the hospital, medical conferences which got nowhere, and forty-eight hours during which Priscilla Rand lay in a coma that defied attempts to bring her to consciousness. Also had followed a night in which two new marks appeared on her throat, just above the partly healed ones that had shown that first night.

On the first night, shortly after Priscilla had been brought in, this Professor Tholl had entered the room. No one of the doctors appeared to have more than a speaking acquaintance with him; none appeared to know just who he was or what he wanted; but he seemed to have unlimited permission in the hospital.

He had stayed with Rick the first night after the others had left, sympathizing with him and studying those small red marks—continually studying them. Now, to-night, he had remained again. And to-night he had made this amazing, the horrible declaration: "Only one thing could have made those marks. A vampire!"

Rick shuddered. Two days ago, at mention of that word, he would have laughed. Now, gazing at those sinister little red dots in the soft white flesh of Priscilla's throat,

and listening to the distinguished-looking elderly man beside him, Rick didn't know what to think!

PROFESSOR THOLL smiled at him. "Is it so hard to believe? But, I tell you, I *know*! Have I spent thirty years of study not to know something of vampirism? Why, the odor in the room, alone, is enough to tell infallibly what's wrong!"

"Odor?" echoed Rick almost stupidly. His eyes, blood-shot with worry, went questioningly toward the professor.

"Yes. Surely you've noticed it—both last night and to-night? I am surprised the physicians here didn't remark on it."

Rick sniffed. He *had* noticed a slight odor, a shade stronger than the smell of antiseptics usually to be found in a hospital, but he had dismissed it from his mind. He wasn't used to hospitals; he had accepted it as a natural odor. Now he concentrated on it again.

More distinctly it came to his nostrils; and now he shivered a little, and an inexplicable icy feeling crept up his spine. A faint but unmistakable smell of things moldering and ancient—a sort of stench of *death*—hung in the air of that small room. Or was it but the product of his imagination. . . .

"You're really smelling it," said Professor Tholl. "You're not imagining it. It is the odor of the vampire. The visiting card, so to speak, a vampire leaves behind. Well, are you convinced?"

"I don't know. . . ." whispered Rick.

"But you *must* be convinced!" said the professor earnestly. "I need your help, Mr. Ballard. And to help me—you must believe! I think I can prove to you that I am right."

"In heaven's name—how?" Rick burst out.

Tholl leaned again over the unconscious girl. He listened to her faint breathing, stared at the red marks. Then he nodded his head.

"I am almost certain that tonight the vampire was driven off by the appearance of the night nurse before he had completed his unearthly purpose. The regularity of Miss Rand's breathing, and the look of those fang marks, both indicate it. If that is true, he may return! We will watch and see."

"But—" Rick stopped. Then he spread his hands in a gesture of utter despair. "All right. I'll do anything you say. Anything! Consider me entirely in your hands."

EFFICIENTLY, methodically, Professor Tholl set the stage for the possible return of the thing he stated was responsible for Priscilla Rand's baffling illness.

He turned out the lights, save for a dim night-light. He opened the window, deliberately, a foot or more, and closed the transom. Then he called the night nurse and informed her that he would be in attendance on Miss Rand all night, and that she needn't come to her room unless specifically summoned. After that, calling an interne, he arranged for Rick and himself to spend the rest of the night in the room directly across the hall.

At five minutes past one they went to this room—to wait. Tholl closed the door. . . .

"But, assuming there really is truth in what you've told me," expostulated Rick, "how will you know when the—the thing has attacked her if you keep the door closed?"

"My boy," said Professor Tholl, laying his hand for a moment on Rick's shoulder, "a little later, when, God willing, we have trapped this creature of darkness, I will tell you something of myself and of the powers I have cultivated.

Just now I'll only say—I will know."

Rick's lips opened for a bewildered reply, but the professor held up his hand sharply for silence. He motioned to the bed. Rick sat down on it. The professor seated himself on the chair, and at once assumed an attitude so intent, so strained, that Rick could only stare at him with increased bewilderment in which was mingled a vague fear of imminent evil.

THERE settled over them an intense, painful silence. Now and then soft footsteps sounded in the corridor outside as the night nurse for the floor answered some number flashed on the frosted glass of the callboard. From far away came the chime of a tower-clock marking the quarter-hours. Save for these sounds there was no noise.

Forty-five minutes passed, during which Rick felt a mounting premonition grow in his heart—a premonition that some dreadful thing was about to happen. Forty-five minutes in which the white-haired man beside him sat as motionless and rigid as a block of stone, concentrating in some obscure way on the strange thing he asserted threatened Priscilla Rand in the room across the hall.

And now the professor's attitude was broken. He sat up straighter. His hands clenched. His eyes narrowed to flaming gray slits.

"It's come!" he said tensely. "It's come! And—it is *he!*"

He started for the door, moving quickly but noiselessly.

"Follow me," he whispered to Rick. "But on your life make no sound."

Rick tiptoed after him, out the door, across the corridor, to the door of Priscilla's room. And as he went, he felt the cold perspiration start out on his body, felt his heart pounding violently. Professor

Tholl's every look and gesture implied authority and learning. In spite of all his training, in spite of all his sophisticated contempt for "superstitions," Rick felt that this man must be right in whatever he might say.

But, if Tholl was right, what awful spectacle would be revealed behind the closed door of Priscilla's room!

The professor glanced at Rick. "Steady!" he whispered. "Keep your head, whatever happens."

Then, with a long breath, the professor laid his hand on the knob, turned it abruptly, flung open the door and bounded into the dimly lit room with Rick close behind.

NEVER would Rick forget the sensation of that moment—the first dreadful knowledge of the presence they had surprised at its dread work within those four walls. The shock was stamped on his brain in lines of flame.

First there was the odor of corruption as they stood inside the closed doorway and blinked in the dim light. That terrible, sickening stench! Stronger, more intense it now was than it had been when Rick had first noticed it. This was the unmistakable odor of the grave—of rotting corpses and utter putridity. It was breath-taking, overpowering. He felt that if he was forced to breathe it any longer he would go mad!

And then he saw the thing they had come to seek; saw it on the bed with Priscilla—on her very pillow, half hidden by her long golden hair—next her bared throat.

Something small and dark and batlike, it was barely to be seen in the vague light. Something with a reddened and repulsive snout, that stared at them with beady, wicked eyes, and squeaked and mewed. Something that flapped loathsome wings and darted up in flight—even

as Professor Tholl leaped to the window and closed it shut.

"We've got him!" grated Tholl, his voice harsh with triumph. "By heaven, we've got him! My sin is expiated—"

Hoarse despair suddenly cracked his voice. "The transom!" he cried. "My God, the transom—"

Rick whirled to stare at it. They had left it closed when they left Priscilla's room, but now it was open. Even as he leaped to draw down the sliding transom-rod, there was a rapid rustling of the dry wings. A loathsome soft, furred thing darted up toward the transom. For an instant it darkened the light shining in from the hall outside. Then, with one final sharp squeak, it was gone.

CHAPTER II

Doctor Quoy

THE professor groaned aloud. His shoulders drooped; his silvery beard swept his broad old chest as his head was bowed at an angle of utter defeat and abasement.

"Fool! Fool!" he muttered. "The chance of my lifetime to exterminate him like the deadly rat he is—and I hadn't wit enough to observe that he'd opened the transom to provide a way of escape for himself! May God forgive me."

Rick, meanwhile, was gasping in the poisonous air of the room.

"Do you mind—" he said finally, "is it all right to open the window? This sickening smell. . . ."

"Yes, yes, open it," said Tholl wearily. "It doesn't matter now. Nothing matters. He's escaped—gone. . . ."

Rick flung the window open, and gradually the odor of corruption and death faded from the room. Then he bent over Priscilla Rand, who still lay motionless on the bed—a marble white figure that

might have been mistaken for a statue save for her faint breathing.

In Rick's eyes was a new frenzy of fear for her, now that he had seen what he had, and could no longer believe that the impossible, the terrible diagnosis of Professor Tholl was incorrect.

He turned toward the old man. "And now?" he said.

"Now we'll go across to the room assigned us. But this time we'll leave the door open! Our enemy is still very near us. I can feel that . . . sense it. . ."

Tholl started toward the door. But before he could reach it, it had swung open to reveal a figure.

IT was an ordinary figure, a body of average height, clad in the plain dark garments of the professional man. But the face atop the conventionally draped shoulders was far from average!

It was a long and narrow countenance, with a long, high-arched nose and a narrow, long chin. In the dead whiteness of the skin—an unwholesome, greenish pallor—were set blood-red lips like a fresh wound. The eyes were dark and narrow and had a hint of a slant like the eyes of an Oriental, but as none of the other features carried out the hint, this was probably an individual and not a racial peculiarity.

The man stood there a moment, peering at them out of his secretive, narrow, black eyes.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded curtly at last. "The hospital has long been closed to visitors for the evening."

Rick glared. He had seen this curious looking fellow, one of the staff doctors, once before; and he had formed for him one of the reasonless, instantaneous hatreds with which complete strangers now and then inspire one.

"We have permission to be here,"

he said angrily. He turned to the professor for confirmation. But Tholl seemed not to have heard what had been said. He was staring at the doctor, staring with an odd intensity that left deep puckers around his keen old eyes.

And then came a most unlooked-for interruption.

FROM the bed behind them sounded a rustling of bed-clothes. Priscilla Rand, immobile as a statue for over forty-eight hours, was moving!

Both Rick and Tholl whirled to gaze at her. . . .

She was sitting bolt upright. Her pale lips were parted a trifle; her face, framed by her silky gold hair, had the dreamy look of a sleepwalker; and her wide eyes were turned full on the red-lipped, dark-eyed doctor.

Then, abruptly, she screamed. It was terrible, that sound, cutting like a knife thrust through the air of the bleak room.

"Oh!" she choked, raising her hand to point fearfully at the doctor. "Oh! Stop him! Stop—"

She fell back on the bed, as lifeless as before.

Tholl's bearded lips writhed back in a snarl that was almost animalistic as he turned to face the doctor.

"So it's you!" he grated. "You! Spawn of hell! And you dare to stand there and ask me what I'm doing here!"

Cold curiosity was the only emotion reflected on the doctor's face. He smiled, a maddening, supercilious smile that made Rick ache to plant his fist in the death mask of a countenance, though he had as yet no idea of the real significance of the scene.

"You have made a mistake in identities," the man told Tholl. "I'm quite sure we've never seen each other before. My name is—"

"Your name is Quoy!" burst out

the professor, his voice cracking with impotent rage. "And you saw me, just three minutes ago, in this room!"

"You must be insane," replied the doctor. "Come, will you leave here peaceably, or shall I have you thrown out?"

Tholl was so enraged he could not reply. For a moment Rick feared he might be about to have a seizure; but after a time the professor regained control of himself.

"We shall leave for the present, Doctor Quoy. But we shall spend the rest of the night across the corridor from this room, with both doors open so we can see this girl and be able to rush to her side at a moment's notice if necessary. And we shall not leave *you* for long. Your career is nearly done! You understand?"

A MOCKING glint appeared in the doctor's beady black eyes, but he only said: "I understand nothing save that you must be mad."

He stood aside in a manner so compelling that there was nothing for Rick and the professor to do but walk out of the room.

They crossed the corridor to the room given them earlier in the evening. The man, Doctor Quoy, watched them closely, his narrow eyes glittering in the corridor light.

"Good night, Professor," he said suavely, when they had reached their door, and stood pointedly holding it open so they could gaze across and see the sleeping girl.

Tholl glared at him, his shoulders erect and defiant. But when the doctor had turned and walked away, when the chalk-white, red-lipped countenance was no longer in sight, the professor's attitude changed. All the defiance went out of it.

"Who is he?" demanded Rick.

Tholl gazed at him with somber

eyes. "Can you ask? Didn't you notice his lips?"

"Yes, but—"

"You didn't notice anything peculiar about them?"

"It struck me they were unusually red, that's all."

"You didn't see—that tiny drop of blood at their corners?"

Rick felt the hair on his scalp crawl.

"You mean. . . ." he whispered at last, though now, of course, he knew.

"I mean that he is our antagonist—that smooth-spoken, snaky-eyed creature that just ordered us out of Miss Rand's room."

Rick started twice to speak before he could get his incoherent thoughts into words.

"Professor, this is—I can't quite—I think you'd better explain, as well as you can, what this is all about. I hope"—he smiled wanly—"you have a fairly reasonable explanation to make. I'm not feeling at all sure of my sanity right now!"

"You're sane enough, my son," sighed Tholl; "though perhaps, when you've heard the explanation you ask for, you'll wish for the forgetfulness of madness. But I'll tell you as simply as I can the events leading up to this scene you just witnessed in Miss Rand's room."

CHAPTER III

The Black Arts

THE things I am about to tell you," said Professor Tholl, pacing back and forth across the floor as he talked, "are things which, in this so-called civilized age, are held to be unbelievable. Nevertheless, I think you will believe them; you've seen the results of one of their manifestations!"

"Thirty years ago I was fortunate enough—or so I thought then—to receive an inheritance from an un-

cle that let me resign my chair at a western college and devote my time to a hobby that had fascinated me since childhood. That hobby was supernatural control of natural phenomena. In a word, what used to be called black magic.

"It was always a conviction of mine that there was some real basis for the old superstitions; that certain beings were able to do miraculous things as a result of their mastery of occult powers; that, centuries ago, there really existed such persons as wizards, witches, magicians.

"With this inheritance, I was able to go into the subject with perfect freedom and to give it my utmost powers of concentration. I devoted to the task the large amount of money I now had at my disposal, and a brain trained to think along logical, constructive lines.

"As a first step I accumulated a library such as never before in history had been collected under one roof. Every tattered old parchment on demonology and witchcraft that I could find I bought and studied. In my library I had over four thousand works of this sort, the majority of them being the only existing copies of their kind and, I am sure, unknown to any other collectors.

"In addition I equipped a chemical laboratory in my house and set out with the latest and most modern apparatus to test the ancient magic formulae listed in my dusty books to see if they would work. Some of them did! I won't go into details. I'll only say that some of the experiments I brought to successful conclusions there in my lonely laboratory should have driven any mortal into giving up the subject in terror and burning the whole gruesome library of formulae and incantations. I did burn it, later . . . too late. . . .

"**R**ASHLY, I went on and on with the work. And five years ago, after twenty-five years of intensive study that will certainly earn me an eternity in Hell, I learned something that I considered my crowning discovery.

"I learned that there existed a certain hitherto unheard of chapter of the works of Cagliostro, the great Italian necromancer, which contained texts more revolutionary, more staggering to the imagination in the power they gave their possessor, than all the works of all my library combined!

"I determined to get this fragment of Cagliostro's book of rituals. As I was getting old and knew there would be a long period of searching needed to uncover this rare document, I decided to hire an assistant to help me.

"Naturally, I picked an assistant with a great deal of care. Such work as mine was dangerous, not only because of the risk involved in dealing with supernatural things, but also because of the attitude the majority of the public has in regard to such matters. Most people haven't got out of the old witch-burning attitude; I didn't dare take any chances of my line of endeavor being made public.

"The man I finally hired seemed ideal. He was from a famous college, extremely intelligent, quiet and self-effacing. He was a graduate physician. From the very start, he showed an interest in demonology fully as great as my own—so great, indeed, that I could not resist the temptation to teach him all I knew and have him help me in the laboratory as well as in the work of tracing that fatal lost chapter of Cagliostro's. His name was Quoy—Doctor Herbert Quoy.

"**T**HREE years went by. Twice I sent Doctor Quoy to Italy to verify rumors of the location of

the document I sought. Each time he came back and reported failure to find it. Meanwhile, the student was surpassing the master! I was neither stupid nor ungifted at my chosen work; but he, it seemed, had pure genius for it. Rapidly I found my own knowledge and ability along the forbidden line of the black arts being eclipsed by his. It puzzled me that with three years of effort, he could go beyond the mark I had reached in nearly thirty years. But I soon found the reason for it!"

The muscles of Tholl's jaws set in harsh ridges.

"I came into the laboratory unexpectedly one day to find him attempting an experiment of his own—working on calculations which, it developed, were to cheat death in a way I will make clear in a moment or two.

"Warned by a queer new rebelliousness against my authority that had lately come into Quoy's bearing, I had forbidden him to use my apparatus or library alone. When I saw him now, I was angry; and I tiptoed toward him, intending to administer a punishment, with a simple occult formula I know, that should teach him manners in the future! So, moving softly, I got near enough to see over his shoulder, and to observe that he was reading a discolored old parchment written in Latin.

"I saw at a glance that it was not a parchment I was familiar with, so I looked closer. And, as he turned a page, I saw a heading—a name—that sent the lust of murder to my heart.

"The document was the lost chapter of Cagliostro! He had actually unearthed it on one of his trips to Italy, and had returned to lie about its discovery and keep it for himself! Wonderful, dreadful storehouse of supernatural power! *That* was why he had progressed so

swiftly in our experiments. *That* was why his three short years of experience had made him more adept at the dark arts than my thirty years had made me.

"**A**T this point he became aware of my presence. He jumped up, with the look of a fiend in his eyes, and his hands began to weave rapidly before my face in a way that would presently call down on me one of the deadliest spells described in my secret library.

"More quickly than I had thought I could force my old body to move, I had leaped at him and knocked him down. In the fall his head struck the corner of a workbench. . . ."

The professor's hands moved spasmodically at his sides.

"I went a little insane during the next few moments. I believe now he was dead with the force of the blow against the workbench. But I didn't think of that, then. I caught up a heavy stool, and my arms were tired before I stopped bringing it down, with all my strength, on his head. Minutes had passed before I regained my self control—to find myself gazing down at a man whom, in the eyes of our civilized laws, I had murdered.

"I had no remorse for that murder. I knew I had rid the world of a great potential menace, for I knew now that this man was all evil—an evil intelligence, linked with all the hellish knowledge contained in Cagliostro's document. What chaos the combination might not accomplish!

"I hid the body in a secret vault in the cellar of the big house I own, here in the city. I burned my library, all but the precious Cagliostro, which I couldn't bear to part with. I easily turned aside all inquiries into the disappearance of my employee, Doctor Quoy.

And I thought that the matter was closed. This was two years ago."

THE professor groaned and buried his head in his hands.

"I soon found that I was hideously wrong—that the matter was *not* closed! I discovered it because I came home late one evening from a visit with a friend to find my Cagliostro gone!

"The library, now furnished with ordinary books, had been double-locked when I went out, and when I came in was still double-locked. The safe, in which I had put the invaluable document, was still closed and showed no signs of having been tampered with. Yet when I opened it the chapter was gone!

"There could only be one answer to the problem of its theft. But for a time my mind refused to accept that answer. . . .

"I went upstairs to my laboratory, more dead than alive, and employed all my acquired powers of divination to the problem. All the rest of the night I worked. And I learned at last just what had occurred.

"Doctor Quoy had passed from life to death with full knowledge of Cagliostro's secret of circumventing death impressed on his intelligence. Of partially circumventing it, that is; only partially! Which is at once the most terrible part of the whole thing—and the chief weapon in our hands.

"The evil soul of the man had sought and found a lodging in some body of one who had just died a natural death. That body—not mutilated beyond usage as I had mutilated his—he could not bring to life. But he could preserve it indefinitely, bend it to his bidding—*undead!* Through special arts, he could make of himself a vampire and still mingle with the world of the living, though not actually alive

himself. And so he goes, with infinite powers at his command to do his evil will—a corpse unburied, animated with a live man's hate, bound to the frightful existence of the vampire.

"And that, my friend, is the Thing that now confronts us!"

RICK drew a long breath. Then he sprang to his feet and started hastily toward the door.

"Stop!" commanded the professor. "Where are you going?"

"To turn this monster over to the police!" exclaimed Rick. But Tholl slowly shook his head.

"I thought so. But really it won't do. Can't you guess what would happen to you if you went to the police with any such tale as this, in spite of the proof offered by the fang marks on Priscilla's throat?"

Rick stopped in his tracks. He *could* guess. Easily! He would land in a madhouse!

Then he started on again, red glints in his eyes. But again the professor stopped him as he read his thoughts.

"It will do you no good to seek out this Doctor Quoy personally, either. In the first place, you would be as helpless as a child in his hands. In the second place, he won't be here any longer."

"Why won't he?"

Professor Tholl pointed to the window. The first red streaks of dawn were showing.

"As a vampire, he is chained to darkness. From sundown to sunrise he moves and has consciousness. During the daylight hours he must lie in his vampire's trance in whatever dark hiding place he has found for himself."

Rick was unsatisfied with this. Incredulously, he went on out into the corridor. He returned in a moment, biting his lips.

"Well?" said Tholl.

"The night nurse says Doctor

Quoy has gone. She says he is never to be found in the hospital after four in the morning."

DURING all the professor's bizarre account, Rick had wavered between credulity and unbelief. Naturally enough, all his training—the training of all normal people—argued against the possibility of such things. Now he burst out with one of his doubts.

"You say this man, Doctor Quoy, worked with you for three years. Yet you didn't recognize him, in Priscilla's bedroom, for several minutes. How was that?"

"Because the body he now inhabits is not the body I was familiar with," Tholl pointed out. "You remember, I said his spirit—soul, intelligence, call it what you please—took possession of the remains of another man, one whom I'd never seen, when I clubbed his own body into such a state that he couldn't use it any more. That was why I could recognize the essential Quoy only by the agitation of Priscilla Rand and by that little drop of fresh blood my old eyes finally distinguished on his lips."

"How did you happen to be here so opportunely in the first place?" demanded Rick bluntly.

"For the last two years," replied Tholl, "ever since my discovery that this evil genius was still abroad, I have haunted every hospital, every hotel and rooming house, every place in the city where people sleep in large numbers, on the chance that some poor unfortunate would turn up with those significant fang marks on his throat. When I heard of such a case here at Grace Hospital, I rushed over at once to see if at last I was on the track of Quoy. The rest you know."

A long, uneven sigh came from Rick's lips. "Yes, the rest I know.

And I believe now . . . there's nothing else for it but to believe. But, Professor, now that you have succeeded in locating this menace, what's to be done about it?"

A GRIM look came over Tholl's venerable old face.

"As I said, in Doctor Quoy's vampirism lies his vulnerability, and our chief weapon. We cannot attack him with much hope of success when he is fully conscious, or when he is clothed in man's form. But if we could locate the hiding place where he lies in a coma every day, or if we could trap him in his helpless bat-shape as we nearly succeeded in doing just a few hours ago. . . ."

The gleam that came into his fanatic old eyes completed the meaning of his sentence.

"Why," said Rick gloomily, "did this horrible thing have to smash into the lives of Priscilla and myself? Why was Priscilla picked out as one of the victims?"

"That was pure fate," said Tholl. "Out of the hundreds of thousands of women in the city, Priscilla was happened on by Quoy. It might have been any other. But as long as it was Priscilla, and as long as you are so directly involved, you will help me exterminate this fiend?"

"With my life," said Rick. "Give me whatever orders you please, and I'll see that they're carried out!"

The broad firm hand of the young man met the slightly unsteady hand of the old one in a tight clasp. And there in the chill hospital room, only a few feet away from the beautiful, unconscious victim of the monster armed so terribly with Cagliostro's dark knowledge, they formed their allegiance. Then they went to Professor Tholl's huge old house to get what rest they could during the balance of the forenoon.

CHAPTER IV

The Enemy Retreats

IT was early afternoon. The two had slept fitfully, all morning; and now, with little appetite, they were having an uneasy breakfast.

"Shouldn't we have got Quoy's address from the hospital last night, and forced our way in there at once?" said Rick.

"For what reason?" inquired the professor.

"To try to catch him there un-awares."

Tholl's heavy eyebrows went up. "I'm afraid you don't understand the nature of our struggle with this man—this animated corpse, to be exact—even yet. Do you really think he would stay openly at a known address during the daylight hours when he is powerless?"

"He might."

"There's little chance of that."

"Anyway," said Rick doggedly, "I think we ought to phone the hospital, find out where he lives, and pay the place a visit just on the chance."

The professor shrugged. "Well, it won't hurt, I suppose," he decided. "I know in advance we won't find Quoy there. But we may find some possession of his, some weapon to be turned against him."

Rick telephoned the hospital and found that Doctor Quoy was listed as residing in a large, well known apartment building about half a mile from Tholl's house. Also, Rick found out something which astonished him, but which the professor had rather expected.

Doctor Quoy had resigned precipitately from the hospital. He had sent his resignation by messenger immediately after leaving, just before dawn, that morning.

"Hopeful, in a way," muttered Tholl. "It shows he fears us at least a little. Only too little, prob-

ably. He knows, and rightly, that he is my superior in occult power. Well, shall we go?"

A FEW minutes later they stood before the hall door of the apartment given as Doctor Quoy's. Boldly, Rick rang the bell. But there was no answer.

"How will we get in?" he asked. Simple as the point was, he hadn't thought of it till now. "I suppose we could break the door down, but that would raise a lot of nuisance for us."

The professor motioned him to stand aside. "Bolts and keys are not the only things that open doors," he said.

Whereupon, he did a curious thing. Rick couldn't quite see what it was, and was never afterward able exactly to describe it. He only knew that the professor's hand barely touched the door knob. The extreme tips of his fingers passed lightly over the polished brass just once. Then his hand seemed to tense, and Rick saw his thumb curve inward till the nail was on his palm.

"Now, open it," said Tholl calmly, stepping back.

Rick turned the knob. The door opened.

"For the good of society," he exclaimed, "I hope you never turn criminal, Professor!"

"And how about the creature who already *has* turned criminal—whose powers make mine look like child's play?" rejoined Tholl.

Rick was silent at that, while a new conception of precisely what they were up against, was born in his mind.

THE two men entered the apartment. As Tholl had been sure it would be, the place was empty. Furthermore, it was stripped of most of its belongings. All Quoy's personal effects were gone; only a

few unimportant possessions were left. He had fled.

The professor disregarded this evidence of flight, which to Rick was crushing discovery. With his silvery beard almost touching the floor, he crouched here and there, like a great animal on a scent, searching for something.

"What are you hunting for?" said Rick.

"For anything that might give us a clue as to Quoy's real quarters," said the professor abstractedly. "The secret, hidden place where he sleeps the daily sleep of the vampire—and where we can ferret him out and drive an aspen stake through his heart! That's what we must discover now. For never again, I'm afraid, will we have the opportunity to crush him while he's busy at his vampire feast."

For nearly an hour they searched the place; but there was uncovered only one thing out of the ordinary, one clue: a sort of miniature stage set up on an escritoire. Over the top of this boxlike little contrivance were draped strings, as though puppets were moved over the stage for some reason or other. A mysterious, seemingly useless device it seemed to Rick. To the professor its fiendish meaning was plain enough; but it added nothing to his inadequate store of information. He knew only that Doctor Quoy, while mocking him at the hospital the night before, had yet deemed him a worthy enough opponent to hide securely from him.

"And with a whole city to hide in, we'll never find him!" despaired Rick. "Meanwhile—what about Priscilla?"

"Perhaps he won't attack her again," said the professor, though his eyes evaded Rick's as he said it. "But he'll certainly attack us! You and I are the only two who know his secret. He can never rest

till he's destroyed us. It's through attacks he'll probably make on us in the near future that we may be able to trace him. We'll hope so, anyhow."

THEY left the doctor's deserted rooms, then, and went to the hospital. There they were greeted with good news. Priscilla had finally regained consciousness, to tell them, with horror-filled eyes, of vague and terrible dreams that had pursued her during the black hours of her trance.

Until nearly midnight Tholl and Rick stayed with her. Then Rick, upon her falling into a normal sleep, decided to go home and get some of his things.

"No, no!" said Tholl. "You're safer here. You can't go out at this time of night—alone!"

"I just want to go to my diggings long enough to get a change of linen and my razor and a few other things," Rick said. But the professor would not hear of this.

"Send a messenger for them, or wait until to-morrow. What may threaten you away from my poor protection, I can't say. But *something* might."

Seeing the old man's perturbation, Rick promised to send for his clothes. But as soon as he had left to go to the desk to phone, he changed his mind. It had suddenly struck him that there was a principle at stake here; a point of honor that was not to be disregarded.

"Let that poisonous rat drive me away from my own home?" snapped Rick at last. "I'm damned if I will!"

He left word at the desk for the professor that he had gone to his apartment, but would be right back, and then went out onto the street.

In Priscilla's room, Tholl shifted his chair nearer the bed while his eyes were almost unblinking in

their alertness. Should those tiny, ominous marks appear once more on the girl's throat, should the vampire visit her once again, it was probable she would sink into an unconsciousness from which she would never wake!

CHAPTER V

Minions of Death

AFTERWARD, in the light of the sinister things he came to learn, Rick could hardly conceive of the foolhardiness that had led him to go alone, in the dead of night, to his apartment.

At the time, however, he thought little of the risk because of his ignorance of the sort of thing that might happen. At most he imagined Doctor Quoy might force his way in and attack him personally; an attack he welcomed rather than feared. At the least—and this was his inward conviction—he would not be molested at all.

In his ignorance, then, and in his weariness and desire for a change into clean things, he had almost dismissed Doctor Quoy and all his possible machinations from his mind by the time he got to his own door.

Mechanically, his thoughts mainly occupied by Priscilla, he fumbled for his key, opened the outer vestibule door, and started up the stairs to his rooms.

Almost stumbling in his fatigue, he let himself in and switched on the lights. Retaining only enough sense of caution to lock and double-lock the door behind him, he went to the bedroom and began packing his suitcase.

When it was that he first noticed the odor, he could not afterward determine. It was very faint at first, so faint that it probably had begun to seep into the room almost with the moment of his entrance. But he had packed his

things and had half undressed for a shower-bath before he threw back his head and sniffed in a startled, puzzled way.

Even then, for a second or two, he wasn't quite sure.

"Funny," he mumbled aloud—that first unconscious recognition of danger when a person talks aloud to bolster up his courage—"funny, I thought I smelled something odd."

His voice died away as suddenly; he *knew* he had smelled something odd! Something he had smelled before!

A strange and ghastly odor of the grave! Of things long dead and clad in mildewed, clotted shrouds, of putrefaction and corruption, of inanimate lumps that rotted in secret places, buried from the light of the sun and the vision of mortal eyes!

RICK froze into immobility. Every nerve in his body seemed to jump and twitch. An icy chill started at the tips of his feet and crept slowly up to his set jaw, till the jaw muscles quivered and strained in ridges that distorted his face.

The stench of death! The visiting card of the vampire—more particularly, of the deadly Doctor Quoy! It was filling the place now till he gasped for breath, till he felt as if he must surely suffocate in the foul atmosphere.

For a long moment Rick stood there, in a room seemingly deserted save for himself, but which he knew was slowly being occupied by another—a dreadful—tenant. Each beat of his heart exaggerated the sensations of suffocation. His tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth. The veins in his neck seemed to swell and harden till the odd thought assailed him that if they were touched they would snap like dry twigs.

Then Rick moved. He started to leave the room, running toward the hall door. This stench . . . this loathsome signature of Quoy . . . never had he known such panic fear as it induced. Escape was all that was in his mind now!

He had almost got out of the room when the events presaged by the terrible odor began.

The first manifestation was a sudden paralysis, binding him from head to foot until it was only with difficulty that he could roll his eyeballs. Lot's wife, turned to a pillar of salt, could have been no more helpless and rigid.

He had got near enough the bedroom doorway to be able to look through it and see the hall door and the possible escape it represented. Yet he could no more complete that short journey than he could fly.

And now a smothered gasp came from Rick's stiff lips—a gasp that was intended for a shout.

Something soft and slimy, something boneless and smooth and loathsome, had crawled over his stockinged foot!

HE fought against the rigidity that held him, willed his head to tilt downward that he might see what dread thing it was that had crawled across his flesh, to leave its viscous cold trail behind it. His head remained set on his neck, locked immovably on his shoulders. Not even the inch that would have allowed him to see the floor at his feet, could he move it.

Then, while his straining eyes tried to roll down enough to vision whatever repulsive mass it was that had touched him, another slimy body trailed its cold length over his instep. And another! And then a fourth! And now his eyeballs, straining downward, caught just a flash of some moving, tapered, yel-

lowish-white thing that might have been the tail of some unbelievably huge, white earthworm.

The stench of the grave grew even more appalling. Rick gagged in the poison of it. Gagged—then gasped for breath again. . . .

Something crawling and hairy had started a slow, tortuous, many-legged path down his bare arm!

In the thin air of the doorway before him, a tiny commotion began to be visible to him. The air wavered and shimmered in ragged small columns, much as heat rays shimmer and vibrate above a hot plate in the sun.

The small columns shaped into more definite lines and grew less shifting in movement. They grew clearer, bolder. White patches etched themselves in behind them. Two narrow, dark slits split the white patches. A blood-red, writhing gash appeared suddenly over a triangle that was now revealed as a long, narrow chin.

Stunned, reeling with horror, Rick found himself gazing at the pallid face of Doctor Quoy.

BODILESS, motionless, it hung there in the doorway, revealed in every detail by the bright electric lights. And Rick stared at it with glazing eyes, his hypnotized gaze going from the blood-red, repulsive lips to the drab, somehow dead-looking hair that sprouted from grayish skin, drawn parchment-tight over a veritable death's-head.

The crimson lips—so terribly suggestive of fresh blood—moved slightly. Words came to Rick's consciousness: “. . . for daring to interfere . . . my existence . . . you shall die. . . .”

“Damn you! Damn you! Get back to whatever Hell it is you come from!”

In a gasping whisper these words came to Rick's ears. He tottered

a little. The whisper had seemed to be his. But he had willed the words to be screamed aloud defiantly.

“. . . shall die. . . .”

The reply tolled out like two notes of a discordant bell. At their conclusion, Rick saw the ghastly head fade slowly into nothingness. Slowly, it reduced itself to the shimmering small columns, like heat waves—so slowly that his eyes continued for seconds to see what was no longer really there, the face disappeared and the doorway was an empty space.

Swaying on his feet, his outraged nervous system almost ready to break down and plunge him into oblivion, he suddenly heard a noise in the other room. Around the corner of the door frame, it sounded; it came from something as yet hidden from his sight by the partition.

IT was a dry, whispering, rustling *rattle*, that sound. With his mind tottering on the borderline of insanity, Rick tried to define it. . . .

The whispering rattle of scales? Of giant, reptilian scales, moving scratchily with the progress of a mighty, serpentine body? No, not exactly. The rustle of stiff silks? That was more like it, but not the precise sound. . . .

And then the horrible simile came to his mind. And so exactly did it fit that, in the next instant, Rick knew it was no simile—but the hideous truth!

That dry, loathsome sound was the noise of *bones*! Bones loosely articulated, insecurely held together by withered tendons and shreds of muscle! Bones rubbing dryly against each other, muted only partially by some clinging, muffling fabric!

Hardly had the stunning realization come to him when he saw something grope slowly around the

door frame and reach out in his direction.

That something was a hand. But it was not a hand; it was a thing composed of five, jointed bones of different lengths, like a loosely spread bundle of sticks only vaguely resembling fingers, held together by cords which were frayed and dabbled with brownish-red clots. And on the middle stick, the longest stick, was something that looked like a fingernail, long and jagged, seeming ready to fall off at a touch.

THE hand crept farther. And now Rick saw that it was attached to a wrist that was, in patches, only bare bones, and in places was padded with bits of spongy, gruesome substance that might once have been flesh. Over this, as the ghastly arm came more into view, he saw draped a fold of grayish-white fabric to which bits of earth still clung.

“Let me die,” prayed Rick, “or faint . . . or go mad. . . .”

And then the thing itself stepped slowly into the doorway till it was fully revealed, framed by the door-sills like a grisly picture. A picture of death in its final form!

Eyeless sockets glared emptily at Rick. Jaws that were on the verge of falling apart, moved slightly. With a dry, whispering rattle, the thing, clad in fold on fold of rotted shroud, advanced toward him.

And then part of his prayer came true. He fainted.

But just before, with a last gasp of terror, he let go—just before his knees sagged under his weight—one final impression his darkening eyes conveyed to his mind: the awful, shrouded thing was still moving, machine-like, toward him . . . that it was almost near enough to touch him with its clawing talons. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Puppets of Doom

BACK at the hospital, Professor Tholl remained in ignorance of Rick's departure for some little time. When the younger man did not come back, he assumed Rick was waiting till the messenger came for orders and the keys to the apartment. Knowing so much better than Rick did the peril that stalked them, he didn't dream that Rick might have been so reckless as to go alone into the night.

Absently, the professor stared at the sleeping girl. Poor, harassed little thing! Only one bright ray pierced the fog of disaster that hung over her: she would not, if she won through her awful experience, be condemned to the usual fate of the vampire's victim—that of becoming a vampire herself after her death. Doctor Quoy's vampirism was not a natural one to be transmitted like a foul disease from one person to the next; it was an artificially acquired thing that would die when he died.

Tholl sighed, looked at his watch, and saw that Rick had been gone over half an hour. His heavy eyebrows drew together. He glanced at Priscilla, decided he did not dare leave her even for a few moments to go and see if Rick was downstairs in the lobby, and picked up the telephone.

In a low voice he talked to the girl at the desk, and was told that Rick had gone to his flat himself!

Tholl sprang to his feet. He was in a quandary. Rick, rashly alone in his apartment, might be in deadly danger. But if he went to Rick's side, he must leave the girl alone here. Which needed him most? Over which was the black wing of Quoy's power hovering nearest?

At this instant the breathing of the slumbering girl lost some of its regularity. Her lips parted.

"Rick. . . ." she moaned. Her arms moved as though she were struggling to wake. "Rick, dear. . . ."

THAT was all. But it was enough to decide Tholl. All his studies had tended to confirm him in the belief that every dream, of every person, had a meaning. In Priscilla's dream she had called out in accents of fear to Rick. Did that mean that she herself was afraid, or that the young man was in some sort of peril? He believed the latter was true.

He pressed the button for the night nurse. He looked at her thoughtfully. A tall, quiet girl with intelligent dark eyes, she appeared to be the sort of person one could tell things to. Almost, the professor decided to confide in her. Then he changed his mind. Better to test the credulity of no one by naming the actual, bizarre danger that hung over Priscilla Rand!

"I must leave here for an hour or so," he told her at last. "As you know, it is thought necessary to have someone with Miss Rand every moment of the night. You have been told why?"

The nurse shook her head.

"It is because she has a queer horror of bats," said Tholl smoothly; "a delusion, if you want to call it that. Therefore, someone must be with her constantly to reassure her if she wakes in terror. Could you arrange to take my place for, say, an hour and a half?"

The nurse glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"Yes," she said. "I go off duty in five minutes. Then my time will be my own. I'll sit in here till you return."

"Good," said Tholl. "And, by the way,"—his tone grew casual—"if an actual bat *should* blunder in at the window, or the transom, for heaven's sake drive it out before

Miss Rand can wake and see it."

"A bat?" echoed the nurse, staring. "In the heart of the city? Impossible!"

"Impossible, at least," the professor agreed. "I just thought I'd mention it. . . ."

THE nurse went out to report, while Tholl fretted at each second of delay. In less than the stated five minutes she was back, and Tholl raced down to the lobby and into the street.

His mind outraced his feet. Speed was essential now. His house was nearer than Rick's apartment. And in his house was his laboratory and a miniature stage, a puppet-show arrangement, much similar to the one they had seen on the escritoire in Quoy's deserted rooms. With that he could set a guard of projected, multiple Professor Tholls about Rick that would be as effective a protection as his own presence, and a quicker one.

He turned toward his home, then changed his mind in mid-stride and hastened toward Quoy's old rooms. They were nearer yet. And he knew how to use the puppet-stage Quoy had left behind him as well as the doctor himself.

To the deserted apartment of Doctor Quoy he hastened with all possible speed. And ever as he went, he prayed that Quoy had not already struck, that he might not be too late in his projected rescue.

In the professor's specially trained mind, as he let himself in through the outer doors of the building where Quoy had lived, a sort of occult bell of warning sounded a muffled peal. But he paid scant attention to it, engrossed as he was in getting to that small stage at once.

That Quoy might have returned, might be at this moment in the room behind the final locked door

where Tholl paused an instant, never occurred to the venerable professor. Although, he confessed honestly later, it certainly should have! Else why should that odd note of warning have sounded dimly in his mind, and a queer, uncanny prickling sensation have momentarily burned all over his body as he opened the door and walked in?

BUT if he was too preoccupied to know that Doctor Quoy was there before he opened the door, he became aware of it the second after he stepped inside! He was made aware of it by the fact that all the lights in the ostensibly vacant place were turned on, and an instant later by finding himself gazing directly at the tense, bent back of Quoy himself!

Doctor Quoy was seated in front of the escritoire. Over his shoulder, Tholl could see enough to know that the thing which was claiming his attention was the tiny stage. Also the professor could see Quoy's hand move above the contraption, and knew that the man's fingers were manipulating the puppet-strings, now duly attached to whatever tiny figures they had been designed to animate.

What dark purpose was being served by that lonely puppet-show? Tholl silently edged nearer to find out.

Had Doctor Quoy not been so lost in sinister concentration, so certain that his two enemies would never think of looking for him in this place from which surely he might be supposed to have fled forever, it is certain that Tholl could not have got so close to him without his having known of it. As it was, the professor found himself stealing nearer, inch by inch, with his hated antagonist still unaware that anyone was in the room with him. At last he was close enough

to see that tiny stage and the tiny figures that were moved jerkily upon it. . . .

HE saw that the stage was partitioned into two spaces, designating rooms. He saw that one of these little rooms, which occupied the major portion of the stage, was supposed to be a bedroom. Then he stared at the puppets.

One of these, even in miniature, was a blood-curdling thing: a sort of skeleton, done in wax the professor judged, and draped in some rotted white fabric. The other figure—

At the sight of the other figure, Tholl gasped aloud—a horrified exclamation at the sound of which Doctor Quoy instantly dropped his puppets and whirled about with a snarl. But for a second or two, deadly as his danger now was, the professor could not move from the spot, or tear his eyes away from that ominous small figure.

For the puppet, with a skill that was diabolical in its perfection, had been shaped to resemble Rick Ballard! And at the moment Tholl's gasp had warned Quoy, the ghastly little wax skeleton had just touched the throat of Rick's image with its tiny claws of hands!

With another strangled exclamation, the old professor wrenched his eyes from the deadly stage, and glared into the hate-filled eyes of Quoy.

"You thing of the grave!" he grated. "Move away from that death-trap while I smash it!"

THE fires in the dark, oblique eyes died down and were replaced by glints of cold mockery.

"The excellent professor forgets," murmured Doctor Quoy, "that I am no longer his underling. I am the master now. There will be no orders given, save those I choose to give myself."

"Will you leave that thing before I kill you?" blazed the professor. Forgotten were his years. His old shoulders had straightened under their weight; and his keen gray eyes shone with a fire almost of youth.

"How can you kill that which you yourself admit is already without life?" mocked Doctor Quoy.

"If I can't kill it—that walking corpse that clothes your spirit—I can at least hold it till dawn. And with the dawn I can drive a stake through that unclean heart!"

Doctor Quoy's eyes burned like bits of jet in a strong light. Like lightning his narrow long hands began a weird sign.

With a cry of rage, Professor Tholl flung himself at him. Quoy eluded the clutching old hands with a snake-like writhe; but the professor, in his charge, knocked over the puppet-stage on the *escritoire*. An instant later he had smashed it to matchwood. With the destruction of the eery tool there was an ear-shattering report, like the roar of a gun.

Doctor Quoy's face was maniacal as he confronted the professor. But before he could begin whatever infernal incantation he was about to hurl at him, there came a peremptory knocking at the door.

The knocking grew louder, changed to heavy blows as someone tried to burst the door in. A voice sounded: "Hello—is somebody in trouble there? I heard a shot."

A second later the door was wrenched from its frame almost enough to spring the lock. And then, just as it gave completely, Quoy flung one swift look of rage at Tholl and disappeared.

EVEN in that crowded moment, with death only just averted and his aged body trem-

bling leaflike under the terrific strain that had been put upon it, the professor had time for one terrible flash of realization.

Quoy had mastered that last and most terrible of all the black arts, dematerialization. Tholl groaned. With that fearful knowledge what chaos might not Quoy be able to bring down at will upon an ignorant and helpless world!

A man stepped over the smashed ruin of the door—a man who hastened to the professor and put a supporting hand under his arm.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Burglary? Attempted murder? What?"

"Burglary," said Professor Tholl weakly. "I was in here, and someone attacked me from behind. I didn't even have a chance to see the man."

His rescuer, a powerfully built, red-haired fellow, stared suspiciously.

"Yes? And what were you doing in here. I live in the apartment next door, and now I come to think of it, this place is supposed to be vacant. I think maybe the police. . . ."

He stopped. His mouth opened foolishly; his eyes half closed as though overpowering slumber were descending on him. Which, as a matter of fact, was the case. . . .

The professor completed with a few passes of his hands the simple hypnotic process he had started. He eased the man gently down on the floor.

"In five minutes you will awake," he commanded, touching the closed eyelids gently.

Whereupon, he left the room and raced to Rick Ballard's apartment. Behind him a sleeping man breathed heavily—to wake up precisely five minutes later and for the rest of his life to tell a tale that was sometimes heard with interest and sometimes laughed at but never by any chance believed.

CHAPTER VII

Of Another World

RICK BALLARD slowly came back to consciousness. For an instant he lay in a daze, his eyes still closed, unable to recall anything. He had been unconscious for an unguessable length of time. . . .

His eyes flew open as memory came to him, and he threw up his arms with a hoarse cry to defend himself from the grisly horror that had been advancing on him.

But the horror was there no longer. In its place was Professor Tholl, bending over him, bathing his forehead with cold water, talking to him in soothing, reassuring tones.

Rick relaxed with a long sigh, content in the realization that he was in some unexplained way safe from further attack. In a short time his fit, muscular body had sprung back to almost a state of normalcy, and he was listening, almost sheepishly, to the professor's account of his trip to Doctor Quoy's rooms and of what he had found there. Then he told his story.

"All I saw was a succession of hypnotic images," marveled Rick. "Yet they certainly seemed real. I felt the cold, slimy things—like snakes they seemed—crawling around my feet. I felt something hairy and spidery crawl down my arm. I thought I saw Doctor Quoy's face—and I was sure I saw that specter from the grave! And now I find they were only mind pictures, instead of the real thing!"

"Don't be so sure they weren't the real thing," said Tholl quietly.

"Real bulk and substance materializing from thin air?" said Rick, with a little smile. "No, I can't believe that. And it isn't necessary to believe it. The other fits in too logically—the hypnotic images induced in my mind from a distance by Doctor Quoy."

THOLL echoed Rick's first statement. "Thin air? There is no such thing! The apparently empty air about us is as teeming with life as the tropic seas!"

He stretched out his arm and swept it in front of him. "When I do that, I have no doubt whatever that I have passed my hand through the substance of some living thing, moving and breathing and solid, but in some other dimension, that is as unconscious of us as we are of it. Doctor Quoy has the power of drawing things from other dimensions into this, or of shifting objects from this to others and back again. Believe me, the things you saw were actually here—not existing only as figments of your imagination."

Rick shook his head. "It makes me out an awful coward, to keel over at the sight of brain-phantoms," he said, "but I'm perfectly certain, now, that I was attacked by nothing more dangerous nor solid!"

Tholl sighed. Then he reached behind him, and brought into view a newspaper, rolled lengthways, as though bundled around some long cylindrical thing.

"Perhaps, then, you'll believe this. One of your visitors, due possibly to sudden death, possibly to the fact that Quoy's invocations were incomplete, didn't return to its own dimension!"

He unwrapped the paper.

Rick gasped as his eyes gazed at the thing the professor had rolled up and hidden from sight on his entrance there. The walls seemed about to fall in on him, while the floor swayed dizzily under his feet. And still his eyes would not close, would not turn away from the one visitor that had not returned to its own world.

A wormlike thing, that was yet longer and bigger than any worm we know. A legless, cylindrical,

viscous mass, colored a dirty yellowish-gray, with its soft, pulpy head smashed in as though it had been inadvertently stepped on...

As though from a long distance, Rick heard the professor saying apologetically, "I shouldn't have showed it to you. You're not recovered yet from your shock. I am very sorry. . . ."

DUSK was falling. The sun's flaming disk was half hidden under the ragged skyline of the city to the west. Rick and the professor were in Priscilla Rand's room at the hospital.

Priscilla, now judged almost well by the hospital staff, although they were still baffled by her mysterious sickness, was sitting up in bed. Her cheeks, which had almost regained all their normal color, were now pallid again; Professor Tholl had decided she was strong enough to stand the shock of knowing precisely what danger threatened her, and was telling her of Doctor Quoy.

There was a hush as he finished. Priscilla gazed out the window at the tip of the dying sun, and watched it sink slowly behind the skyline. Now her wide eyes went back to the venerable, bearded face.

"What are we going to do?" she whispered. Not once had she doubted the truth of Tholl's astounding story. Her woman's instinct told her it was all fact; forbade her a single one of the doubts that had lingered so long in Rick's mind. "This man—this monster—seems all-powerful!"

"Powerful enough," admitted the professor. "But only in the hours of darkness, remember! During the daytime he is in a helpless trance. It is during the daytime we must find him and destroy him. But, during the daytime, my only method of locating him is not effective."

Priscilla gazed quickly, hopefully, at him.

"You *have* a method of finding him, then?"

"Yes. A rather terrible method, and one that involves great risk—to you, even more than to Rick and myself."

"To *me*?"

"Yes. I have said my method is not effective during the daylight hours, when Doctor Quoy is in his vampire's trance, because then he gives off no psychic aura of activity for me to work on. But if we try to search for him at night it means that you must be left unguarded!"

"And that," burst out Rick, catching her hand, "is not to be thought of!"

PRISCILLA stared at the window, which was now a slowly darkening oblong as dusk deepened to night. From the street outside came a shrill shout as a newsboy, disregarding the hospital zone of quiet, cried an extra. The words drifted up to them, only half registering on their preoccupied minds: "Extra! Extra! Girl kidnaped! Police combing the city! Girl kidnaped. . . ."

Priscilla shuddered as the words finally penetrated her full consciousness. Girl kidnaped! And what might be *her* fate if she were left alone during the period of Doctor Quoy's greatest activity!

But none of this misgiving showed in her tone as she said: "There's nothing for it but to leave me unguarded. This creature must be trapped, and if he can only be hunted down at night, then you two dare not waste time by staying inactive in this hospital room!"

"I won't have it—" began Rick.

"Ssh," said Priscilla, squeezing his hand.

"There is an alternative," said Professor Tholl, avoiding her gaze.

"I can go out alone, leaving Rick here with you."

Priscilla smiled. There was in that smile the sort of determination that sent women, without a backward glance, rolling in covered wagons into fearsome Indian country with their men a hundred years ago. Her eyes compelled Tholl's to meet them.

"You aren't very young," she said gently. "Yours is the brain and the knowledge, but not the body. You need the muscles of this young husky to back you up. You must both go."

And so it was finally decided. There was, really, nothing else to do. It was foolish to wait passively for Quoy to come and attack them, illogical to do anything but try to search him out as speedily as possible, taking whatever risks might come up on the way!

They went out, with admiration in their eyes for the quiet courage of Priscilla, and with fear in their hearts for what might happen to her during the long night. And as they went, the final cries of the unseen newsboy came faintly from the distance: "Extra! Big Kidnaping mystery! Girl disappeared. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

Unholy Divination

THE two men turned toward the professor's gloomy big house. As they went, Tholl's face was grave and troubled, and for a long time he said nothing. Equally silent, Rick walked beside him, uneasily glancing about him now and then into the darkness, thankful for every street-light. The evil powers of Doctor Quoy might at that very instant be hanging over them like a sword of Damocles, ready to drop and snuff out their lives.

"What is this method of yours

of finding out where Quoy is operating?" he said at last.

"You'll soon see," was Tholl's somber reply.

"We're on our way to your house now for your equipment, or tools, or whatever you call them?"

"Yes," muttered the old professor, "for my tools. . . ."

Rick glanced at his face. In the uncertain light it had almost a greenish tinge.

"You spoke of risks," he persisted. "What are they—physical, or psychical?"

"That, too, you will soon discover for yourself," said the professor. He sighed. "It is a terrible thing to interfere with natural laws. Unexpected, unguessable things may happen. . . ."

No more was said during the balance of the walk. They turned into the drive leading to the huge old house.

It was in pitch darkness. No light showed at any window. The professor had no servants, preferring to live hermitlike in a few of the rooms and let the rest of the house cover itself with dust, rather than have a housekeeper to interfere with his private observations and experiments.

Tholl turned the key and pushed open the door. Rick almost exclaimed aloud with relief when the professor switched on the lights in the old-fashioned, ill-kept hall.

WITHOUT pausing, Tholl went down the hallway to the door in the rear that led to the steep basement steps. He turned on another switch, illuminating the cavernous cellar. Rick followed him into its depths. As he went, he felt the now familiar icy shiver of something weird and terrible about to happen, an intuitive warning, having nothing to do with reason.

"I'm becoming positively psychic!" he said aloud, with a twist-

ed grin. He said it more to break the oppressive silence than because he expected an answer. But the professor replied quite seriously:

"Probably you are temporarily endowed with a reflection of my own psychic sensitivity. But please do not talk any more. A hard mental struggle lies before me. I must compose my mind for it."

They traversed the big cellar to the rear wall. Here the professor halted.

Rick, gazing at it, could see no more than that it resembled any other wall, constructed of blank cement blocks which were cracked here and there with the weight of the old house. But the professor's eyes gleamed a little as he bent nearer one of the blocks and touched a ragged crack that split it diagonally from end to end.

Rick stared. The cracked block, and four more above and below it, swung aside to form a narrow doorway. Tholl motioned, and Rick followed him through it and into a low tunnel, the roof of which was crudely shored up with timbers.

At Tholl's touch, the secret door slid into place, leaving them in the darkness of the tomb. Rick felt the professor tug at his arm; he walked ahead, paused a moment while, he surmised, Tholl opened another portal; then followed forward a few steps.

They stopped; and, thrusting out his arms on either side, Rick could touch nothing. They were in a fairly large chamber, or cave. He heard the professor mutter something under his breath. Then there was a click, and light flashed up.

THE prosaic electric-light bulb, hanging from a cord in the roof, intensified rather than diminished the horror of that underground place. The harsh, glaring light shone only too clearly on the festooned spider webs, and the

slow oozing drops of moisture that appeared from the raw earth of the walls to drip monotonously between the rough supporting timbers. The air of the place was damp, stifling. It was like a crypt.

And then Rick started, while his face went chalk-white. He stared with pounding heart at something stretched out in one corner, something that sprawled in ghastly rigidity on the earth floor.

Like a crypt? The place was a crypt in actual fact! There was its corpse!

It was the body of a man of average height. To judge by the condition of the flesh, and the look of the splotched, discolored clothes that covered it, the body had been there a long time. Another thing that hinted that it had lain there for long was the hair on face and head, curled and rank and unkempt, like foul weeds growing on a grave mound.

The face was covered with dried, reddish-brown splotches. And these were seen to have come from the head, the back and top of which were horribly crushed in.

"My God!" whispered Rick. "Who was this?"

"That is the mortal part of the man I hired in an evil moment to be my assistant, Doctor Herbert Quoy. And that"—the professor's face became set and grim—"is the 'tool' I am about to use in trying to locate Quoy's whereabouts. To that lump of clay is chained the spirit of the man whose body Quoy now wears—a spirit that shall be my helper!"

Rick was speechless. The overpowering closeness of the air in that hidden cave, the subtle warning of dread things about to happen, above all the presence there of that ghastly, pallid figure, filled him with a longing to be through at once and rush back out into the clean, open air.

THE professor knelt beside the sprawled body. His hands went slowly out toward the red splotched face. But before they touched it, he gazed up at Rick.

"This is a moment of great danger," he said. "I have never dared try such an experiment as this before, so I do not know exactly what may happen. Whatever it is, be on the alert for it!"

Wordlessly, Rick nodded. The professor began the procedure that was to haunt Rick from then on in nightmare-ridden sleep.

A sentence came sonorously from the professor's lips. Rather, it was a succession of sounds, no one of which was familiar to Rick, but which in combination sounded like a phrase in some forgotten tongue.

Tholl's long, sensitive fingers lightly touched the lid of the right eye that was sunk deep in the grisly ruin of the face. Then he was silent.

For what seemed to Rick hours, the tableau held: Tholl kneeling motionless beside the corpse, his eyes half closed and his face tense as if he were concentrating all his mental powers on some gigantic task; Rick standing beside him and a bit to the rear, staring at the pallid thing which had once housed a spirit that was now walking abroad, clothed in another's flesh. Then an astounding, an awful thing happened.

The right eyelid, which Tholl had touched lightly, quivered perceptibly. Jerkily, a fraction of an inch at a time, it opened to reveal the sunken, shriveled eyeball beneath. And at sight of that shrunken eye, Rick felt his throat contract till his lungs labored for breath.

The eye was alive!

THE body was patently lifeless; the face was a clotted mass obviously verging on actual

decomposition. But in that deathly face the eye lived and moved! It rolled in its socket and glared first at Rick and then at Tholl.

An instant later a second miracle took place. The withered lips moved, disclosing jaws from which several teeth had already dropped out. A voice sounded—a voice that was harsh and hoarse, that was dull and hollow, as a voice might be that is heard in a tunnel a long way off.

"I am here. What do you wish?"

Rick was battered by a very insanity of terror at the sound of that sepulchral voice. But with an enormous effort of will he kept from shrieking aloud, and remained motionless by the professor's side.

"I command you," said Tholl in a low, shaken voice, to direct us to the presence of—you know who!"

With the last three words a fearful change took place in the rigid body. The eye fairly flamed. The lips writhed and hissed. The whole figure twitched as if galvanized by an electric charge.

"Where is he?" said Tholl. "I command you to tell."

The loosened, yellowed teeth clashed together. A last spasmodic quiver touched the stark limbs. Then the corpse was still. There was silence—a silence so deep that Rick could hear, like a drumbeat, the thudding of his heart.

"My God," groaned Tholl, "have I failed?"

He stopped. From the dead lips was coming the hoarse, sepulchral voice.

"The one you seek . . . stone house with red roof . . . beside the cemetery men call Tyn—Tyn—"

"Yes," said the professor. Beads of sweat stood out on his face as he leaned over the corpse and willed it to go on. "Yes, Tyn—what?"

"Be quick . . . or too late. . . ."

the voice went on, haltingly. "Tyn—Tyn—"

Like the mechanical failure of a clockwork thing that has run down the hollow voice faltered and stopped.

"Go on!" cried Tholl, his face livid with excitement.

But the lips moved no more. The voice was stilled.

THE professor clenched his fists in helpless anguish. But Rick thought he had understood. "Maybe the thing means Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery," he suggested shakily. "Maybe—"

He stopped, appalled; and at the look in his eyes, the professor whirled to gaze at the corpse.

That fearsome object, with a soft snapping of stiffened joints and withered tendons, was getting to its feet. The single opened eye glared with the fires of hell as the body lurched toward the two who had dared to use it, in defiance of the laws of death, for their own mortal purpose.

"The door—" gasped Tholl. "Quick!"

But already the corpse had launched itself stiffly toward them, its gaunt arms flailing like jointed tree branches as it reached the professor.

Fighting down a wave of repulsion that was nauseating in its intensity, Rick sprang to help the old man. He lashed out with his fists, battering at the dead thing.

His fists found nothing solid to injure. His clawing hands sloughed through clammy substance too insecure to grasp. But he managed to send the awkward figure tottering back for a second.

It was enough. He dragged the professor to the entrance, and slammed the wooden barrier just as the awful thing in the cave thudded against it.

Staggering a little, like creatures

moving endlessly in a nightmare, they returned the way they had come, leaving behind them a huddled figure bathed only too clearly in the raw glare of the electric bulb. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Under the Red Roof

"**T**YNSDALE HOLLOW CEMETERY," said Professor Tholl, looking up from a list of cemeteries in and near the city. "That must be the one. There are no others with a first syllable remotely like that. Come, we'll hurry there at once, and see if there's a house with a red roof."

Out along the river's edge they sped, in a hired motor that broke all speed laws under the guidance of a well-paid driver. They came to Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, and, as they drove by, Tholl exclaimed aloud with grim triumph.

"There!" he said, pointing.

Rick's eyes followed his leveled finger, and by the light of one of the sparsely-scattered electric lamps, saw an old stone house with a red-tile roof and boarded windows, on a weedy lot just across the fence from the cemetery. Indeed, less than twenty yards away from it was a newly-dug grave, looking like a bloody gash in the earth by reason of the dull reddish color of the dirt prevailing in that section.

They got out, paid the driver, and dismissed the car. Then, sure that no one was around at that late hour to see them, they walked cautiously up to the house, and around it to the rear.

No light showed anywhere in the house. The boarded windows were as blank as blind eyes. An atmosphere of desertion and decay hung over the place; plainly it had not been occupied for years.

"Can this be right?" whispered

Rick dubiously, staring about him.

"Next to a graveyard—a deserted house, yes, I think it's the right place," the professor whispered back. "And, God willing, our enemy will be inside alone."

"And if he is?"

"It is near dawn. Between us, we will try to hold him till his trance overcomes him. Then he will be at our mercy."

A doubt that had persisted in Rick's mind since the first mention of tracking Doctor Quoy, came from his lips.

"With all his uncanny powers, won't he know automatically when we are near him? Won't he be aware of all our movements and be ready for us?"

The professor shrugged. "Probably he will. Almost certainly he will! Our only chance is that he may be so engrossed in some of his black work that his very concentration will let us creep up on him."

HE turned to the locked rear door. It soon opened under his manipulations. He pushed it aside, gently, noiselessly, and the two men tiptoed into a dark room that had once evidently been used as a kitchen.

At once the gruesome stench of death assailed their nostrils. The grave was very close, that odor silently insisted. Death was all around them in that dark old house. But they stole onward, through a doorway, down a hall, and into a middle room that might once have been a drawing room or parlor.

At the threshold of this room they stopped, utterly paralyzed by the sight that met them.

The room was dimly lit by a solitary stub of candle that flickered and guttered on the floor. It had so nearly burned itself out that, just as they stared with terrified eyes at the scene of horror

there, the tiny flame leaped higher in its expiring burst, and gilded every detail with pallid flame.

A veritable lake of red widened sluggishly, slowly, in the center of the floor. The walls were daubed with red; red was smeared on the door-frame beside them. Sodden with it, a little heap of torn blue fabric—what was left of a woman's street-suit, lay near the dying candle.

And in the center of the horrible red lake was a white, distorted figure. A girl's figure that seemed at first entirely nude—and at second glance to have a filmy red mantle thrown over it.

The demon, Quoy, was gone. They had come too late to catch him. Only this, his handiwork, was here to greet them.

Silently, almost felled by this crowning horror in a fearful night, they turned and ran.

"ANTHROPOMANCY!" said Professor Tholl, as they wearily entered his house. "Anthropomancy! The most hellish of all the black practises. So that is the answer to the 'kidnaping mystery' we heard cried in the papers!"

"May God strike him dead," said Rick hoarsely.

"May God let us extinguish the black soul of him," amended the professor. "Death, alone, has no meaning for Doctor Quoy."

They flung themselves down in the professor's room, Rick on a low couch, Tholl on the bed.

"We'll sleep if we can," said Tholl.

"Sleep?" Rick shook his head. "I feel as though I'll never be able to sleep again!"

"Fatigue does marvelous things," said the professor. "Close your eyes; give exhausted nature a chance."

Presently Rick's eyes drooped;

now they were closed in slumber.

It may have been exhausted nature that brought him sleep; it may, perhaps, have been a few obscure, odd gestures the old professor made with his slender hands, as though he were weaving strange patterns in the air. . . .

IT was afternoon when Rick woke, to find Professor Tholl engaged in the prosaic task of setting a meal on the table in the center of the room. He took a hurried cold shower, dashing the icy water into his still tired eyes, and sat down to eat a tasteless meal and talk the situation over with the professor.

"After all, we know one thing that is faintly heartening," said Tholl. "Doctor Quoy is at least disturbed enough to want to divine the future in his own fiendish way. That would seem to indicate that he fears that future. If we could only know what he read in the results of his unspeakable surgery!"

"Probably death for you and me," said Rick gloomily, "and, a little later, for Priscilla. Unless," he added hopefully, "he will decide to pick out some other victim, now that Priscilla has been warned against him."

Professor Tholl shook his head. "A vampire never relinquishes a victim," he said heavily. "As long as Doctor Quoy remains at large, Priscilla is doomed."

They went to the hospital, then, to find a somewhat rebellious patient on their hands.

"I'm perfectly all right, now," protested Priscilla. "I'm feeling fine. I think I ought to go home."

THOLL gazed thoughtfully at her. It didn't need a specialist to tell that she was speaking the truth. The flush of delicate health lay bright on her skin. Her long,

honey-colored hair seemed to crackle with vitality. Her eyes had lost their sunken look, and were clear as spring-water. Nevertheless, Tholl shook his head.

"Who lives at home with you?"

"My aunt," said Priscilla, "and our old servant, Kemp. Kemp is devoted to me. I really think she'd die for me."

"But she is old, and a woman," Tholl broke in. "Certainly not a very stalwart protector! No, you'd better stay on here, where there is a night and day staff, and where Doctor Quoy's attempts against you would be offered at least a little resistance."

"Then you failed in your move against him last night?"

"Yes," said Tholl, "we failed."

He told her a little of what had happened. A very little! Mercifully, he spared her the real story of Quoy's dark activities in the deserted house; and mercifully he said nothing of the true nature of his own work in the secret cellar of his home.

"Then the situation remains unchanged?" faltered Priscilla.

"Yes. There is only one ray of hope. We have found one spot, at least, where Doctor Quoy has been. He may return to it. We will watch that spot. . . ."

THE watching was to prove fruitless.

For two nights Rick and the professor stood alternate guard over the deserted house with the red roof. During neither of these nights did Quoy visit it—at least not in a form visible to mortal eyes. Then the two had to abandon their watch. The police had found the body; and Rick and Tholl dared not stay near the house for fear they would be implicated in a murder charge.

For a week the sensational story was played up in the newspapers as the undoubted work of a luna-

tic. And for a week Rick and the professor, the only ones beside the perpetrator who knew the truth of the crime, kept close guard over Priscilla to ward off the attack of the deadly enemy—who failed to attack!

"I can't stand much more of this inactive waiting!" snapped Rick at the end of the seventh long night. "Hanging around, doing nothing, knowing that at any moment Doctor Quoy may attack for the last time—"

"What else can we do?" replied Professor Tholl. "As you know, I am spending every possible moment in my laboratory, trying to locate the real, daytime hiding place of Doctor Quoy. Until I can do that, we can't move against him."

"Are you any nearer success now than when you started your laboratory experiments?" demanded Rick.

"No," admitted the professor, "I'm not. As yet I don't know what is to be our next move."

But their next move, or rather Rick's, was to be made at once—and in a strange and eery fashion.

CHAPTER X

The Aspen Stake

IT was the custom of the two to rise from their fitful daytime sleep in the early afternoon, force themselves to eat a kind of breakfast-luncheon, and go to the hospital before dusk fell. But next afternoon this procedure was varied.

When Rick woke and glanced automatically at the clock, he saw that it was five minutes past four. Even then he woke up, not because his jangled nerves warned him it was so late, but because someone was shaking him violently. He blinked dazedly, still half-asleep, to find the keen face of Professor Tholl gazing excitedly down at him.

"Rick!" came his voice again, now penetrating Rick's dulled consciousness like a knife blade. "Rick! Wake up! I've got it! At last I've found where Doctor Quoy hides from the daylight! Dress and come with me at once."

Rick was instantly on his feet. "You know where he is?"

"Yes, I know! There is nothing for us to do now, but go to him in his helpless coma and snuff out that dark intelligence forever!"

Rick proceeded to dress hastily. There was no thought of eating now. The thing to do was go at once and reach the terrible Quoy before darkness fell!

"Where is he?" he demanded grimly, as the two started precipitately down the stairs.

"Follow me," was all Tholl said, as he hurried down to the street.

A motor was waiting at the curb. It was not a regulation cab. Unusually small windows were set in sides and rear; and the rear one was covered by a roll-curtain. It seemed to be waiting on order of the professor, however, so Rick stepped in at once.

THOLL gave orders in a low voice, and the car started rapidly down the street. The professor, as they rolled along, told how he had located Quoy at last.

There was a certain herb, it seemed, that emitted a dense smoke if burned properly in a special crucible. In that smoke, if one were initiated, one could see distant images as on a cinema screen. For days Tholl had been trying to wrench the secret of Quoy's hiding-place from the smoke. This afternoon he had succeeded!

"And we are now on our way, at last, to end the career of this infernal being!" marveled Rick, who had listened, absorbed, to the account.

"Not quite yet," replied the old

professor; "but in a very short while! Now we are going to pick up the actual instrument that will destroy him—a tool specially prepared in special surroundings. When we have got that, we shall go to Quoy!"

At that moment the car stopped.

Tholl ordered the driver to wait, then turned and hastened away.

Rick, stumbling after him, had only an instant of time to realize that they were crossing a weedy, open field. Then they were in an impossibly narrow underground passage of some sort, which extended for a long distance to widen into a subterranean room.

In this room was apparatus of a kind for which Rick had no adequate words of description. There were oddly curved rods, and earthen retorts. A pile of dried weeds took up one corner. In another corner was a long narrow box that must certainly be a coffin. In the center of the room was a low workbench, and on this bench was a curious thing.

It was a sharpened piece of wood about three feet long and several inches thick. The sharpened end tapered to a fine, almost needle-like, point, and its blackened surface indicated that it had been hardened in fire.

"The stake!" breathed the old professor. "The aspen stake that shall be plunged into his breast!"

HE clutched it, and they hurried back through the passage to the weedy, open space and to the waiting motor.

"And now," said Tholl, his voice vibrant, "for Doctor Quoy!"

Faster the cab flew. It was like a dream ride. Then Rick, glancing out the small windows began to see familiar street sights. Here he recognized a building, there an electric sign.

"Why!" he ejaculated at last,

"we're going directly back toward your house! Quoy is hidden near there?"

"Yes." Professor Tholl fingered the sharp point of the aspen stake. His eyes were glittering. "You see the ingenuity of his choice? We would never dream of searching near at home. But we've got him now!"

Rick closed his eyes while a wave of exultation passed through him. With wide, unseeing gaze, he followed the professor as the cab stopped, up a walk and into an old doorway.

The professor held up his finger for silence, and began to tiptoe up a curving staircase. Cautiously Rick followed, taking infinite pains to make no noise. They entered a room, an ordinary room outfitted as a bed chamber. And there on the bed Rick saw lying a straight, still figure.

Even at that tense moment Rick found time to be surprised and a little taken back. He had visioned the sinister Doctor Quoy as passing his vampire's sleep in some hideous, buried place—not in an ordinary bedroom in an ordinary residence. But the thought passed immediately from his mind. The important thing was that Quoy was here. Actually in the same room with him, lying helpless in slumber!

ALMOST holding his breath lest he wake the sleeper, though the professor had told him that the coma of vampirism is almost that of death, Rick moved toward that still figure on the bed. Beside him tiptoed the professor.

Nearer they came. Nearer . . . till they were bending over the sleeping figure, and gazing directly down at that face which was an incarnation of evil. Fascinated, Rick stared at it. The red, red lips; the pallid skin, like a pale, un-

healthy mushroom growth; the long, slit eyes, hidden now under eyelids that looked like unwholesome bruises in the waxy countenance!

"Victory!" whispered the professor. His right arm, with the stake held in his hand like a short spear, was raised high. "Victory!"

Like a splendid statue of an old warrior, he stood there, the stake poised for its deadly down-stroke. Then, slowly, with trembling arm, he lowered it. His eyes closed. A hissing moan came from his lips.

"I dare not," he muttered. "I dare not. I am old. My arm is no longer strong. I doubt if I have the power to thrust so deep."

He turned suddenly to Rick, and thrust the stake toward him.

"You!" he said. "*You do it!*"

RICK took the stake, staring at the old professor in a dreamy sort of surprise. With that fearfully sharpened point, it seemed even a child could find the monster's heart! But he thought he could divine the true reason for the professor's hesitancy.

This unnatural creature stretched before them was in a sense Tholl's own creation. He had given him unwittingly the opportunity to steal and use for his own purposes the awful secrets in Cagliostro's lost document. This chance to undo, with a single stroke, the evil he had done, was too much for him; it had unstrung him.

"Well," thought Rick, "*I have no such self-doubt! I'll send this stake through chest and heart and back, and into the bed beneath!*"

Grasping the lancelike thing, he raised it even as Tholl had done, and poised it over the immobile figure. But there he, too, halted for an instant.

The training of everyday, prosaic life is hard to break. Tholl had told him—and heaven knew he

believed sincerely—that the body before him was not alive, was simply undead, an animated corpse kept up only by its vampire diet. Nevertheless, to his eyes and instinct, the thing *looked* like the living body of any other man. And the plunging of that aspen stake into the heart was no less than murder!

HE had never dreamed it would be so hard a thing to do. He had fancied that, given the opportunity, he would drive the stake into Quoy's breast with no more compunction than he would have smashed the head of a snake.

But now, standing beside the hated figure, with the aspen stake held high, he hesitated. . . .

Murder! his instinct shrieked to him against all the dictates of reason. Cold-blooded murder, that's what it was! To stab an unconscious, helpless man. . . .

"Strike!" hissed the professor. "Be quick—before it is too late!"

Rick's fingers tightened on the smooth wood. He glared down at the evil, red-lipped face, gaining strength for his act from the loathsomeness of the pallid features. His arm tensed for the downward stroke. . . .

A crash like the report of a pistol shot split the air. Rick's arm faltered. The descent of the stake was stayed. He glanced down to see if Doctor Quoy had stirred in his trance.

He was looking, not at the repulsive face of Quoy, but at the bearded, venerable countenance of Professor Tholl! And the body on the bed was the body of Tholl, just moving now with returning consciousness as sleep passed from it!

PHYSICALLY, Doctor Quoy cannot touch me," the professor said. "That much power at least

I have to combat him with. So he plotted to have *you* kill me, in the nightmare he sent you. He had to have you get the stake with your own hand, because he could not bring it to you: I have reason to think he can pass through walls of brick and stone, but I am very sure he could not drag so inanimate a lump of substance as a stick of wood with him."

Rick's face was buried in his shaking hands. "My God!" he groaned. "What a frightfully close call! One more second—"

Tholl stared at him in blended pity and horror. Then he glanced toward the window. Beside that lay a heavy screen he was in the habit of setting before the opened window to keep the direct draft from him while he slept. A gust of wind had swept through the window, tipping over the heavy screen with a sharp crash. On that his life had hung!

Then, as Tholl gazed at the window, the color left his face and his eyes widened with realization of a vital, an ominous fact that their preoccupation had thus far kept the two men from noting.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Look!"

Rick whirled to face the window too. Then his own face went white.

The window was an oblong of pure black. Night had fallen—deep night—how long ago he could not guess.

HE glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to ten minutes past eleven. They had slept for fourteen hours, for over three hours of which Priscilla Rand had been left unguarded and alone. Rick had merely, in his dream, *thought* it was still afternoon; actually he had gone out into pitch darkness, returned in darkness, and turned on the lights in the room under the hypnotic power of Quoy.

The ringing of the telephone burst in on the men's dazed thoughts. Rick and Tholl gazed at each other; then the professor moved to answer it.

"Professor Tholl?" came a woman's voice. "This is the Grace Hospital. Do you, or Mr. Ballard, know where Miss Priscilla Rand has gone?"

With difficulty, Professor Tholl forced himself to answer. And then he had to repeat it before the operator at Grace Hospital understood his words.

"We haven't heard from Miss Rand. She is not at the hospital?"

"No. She has left. Her clothes are not here, and she said nothing about leaving, and no one has seen her go. Shall we notify the police?"

"Not—just yet," said Tholl. "Wait. We will be down at once!"

"Gone . . .?" whispered Rick as the professor hung up.

"Yes. God help her! Quoy has surpassed himself to-night. He meant to kill me, have you dragged to a murderer's cell, and make away with Priscilla, all in one diabolical night! You and I, by the grace of heaven, escaped. But Priscilla—"

He stopped. In Rick's eyes was a picture of the thing they had seen under the red roof. The white, distorted figure in the crimson lake . . . anthropomancy. . . .

CHAPTER XI

Into the Night

IN her room at Grace Hospital, Priscilla had marked with impatience the slow flight of the afternoon hours. It was irksome, this continued stay, when she felt perfectly well. She was tired of reading; tired of roaming from her room to the terrace, and being stared at curiously by really sick people; tired of having monotonous hospital meals served her, and be-

ing hemmed in by an invalid's routine.

The place had become a jail to her. Nevertheless, she realized the wisdom of staying here in obedience to the professor's wishes. Involuntarily her hand went to her throat, where two sets of small red marks had barely healed. . . .

Restlessly she walked to the window, which faced west, and watched the lowering sun. Six-thirty. Rick and the professor were usually here by now. She wished they would come.

As the sun sank lower and lower, she began to have a growing unease. Again her hand strayed to her throat. If they were forced to leave her alone another night, she would face it with all the courage she could muster. But the thought of that eventuality, of staying awake hour after hour through the long night, waiting, waiting to fight off a possible attack of the malignant Quoy, as she had done a week ago, turned her pale.

She called the nurse. "Has Mr. Ballard, or Professor Tholl telephoned the hospital?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Rand."

"Oh. . . . I thought one of them might have called you with instructions for the night."

The nurse left. Priscilla tried to interest herself in a book. It was a dismal failure. Her eyes kept straying toward the window, where the last dim red of sunset barely showed.

Night fell. An odd drowsiness stole over her. She was a little surprised at it. Having no outlet for her energies, she had been finding it hard to sleep nights. And now, at only a little after eight, and worried as she was by the failure of Rick and Tholl to appear, she was sleepy and found it more and more difficult to keep her eyes open!

DETERMINEDLY she fought against her drowsiness; then she began to yield to it. Rick and the professor would surely be along soon. Why not take a nap till they arrived?

Almost with the thought, sleep dropped on her. Deep, thick sleep, that yet left her dimly conscious of her surroundings. A queer sleep, which, despite her will, she could not shake off—but a sleep which left her five senses open to vague and far-off impressions.

She knew, for instance, when the hands of the clock beside her pointed to a quarter of ten. She heard the nurse tiptoe in, and out again, after glancing at her and turning on the dim night-light. And she was fully conscious of a curious odor that began to permeate the air.

It was a revolting odor, a stench that nauseated her. She moved uneasily, but was still unable to break the chains of the strange, numbing sleep that bound her.

And now she became aware of two eyes staring at her. Her own eyes were closed; but still she could see those staring orbs, as though they were etched flamingly on the insides of her eyelids.

Long, narrow, and black as jet, they glared unblinkingly at her. And soon she was rising slowly from the bed, and was mechanically dressing. A small part of her was aware that she didn't want to do this—that above all things she must resist the unspoken command to be read in those narrow black eyes. But she couldn't resist. Plastic as wax to the will behind the glittering eyes, she walked to the door of her room.

Down the corridor she went, seeming to float more than to walk. There was no one in the corridor; no one was near the window leading to the fire-escape ladder. Afterward the nurse on duty in that

wing was to recall that she had been summoned to a far room, only to find the patient there asleep. . . .

Still only mistily conscious of what was happening, as though groping blindly at the bottom of a sea of horror, Priscilla descended the steep iron steps of the escape, to find herself on the ground.

Helplessly obedient to the inexorable will flaming in the evil black eyes, she started off through the starless night, seeing only as wavering phantoms the few passersby on the back streets along which lay her path. . . .

THE hospital was seething with activity when Rick and Tholl got there. Nurses and internes hurried quietly through the corridors, and in and out of rooms. Rick and the professor were met by the head physician of the staff who had chanced to be awake and dressed when called at his home.

"This is most mysterious, most distressing," he said. "The only thing we can believe is that Miss Rand walked down the corridor and out the fire-escape window in her sleep—or something—" He glanced intently at them. "There has been some mention of mental unbalance in connection with her case, I believe?"

Rick started hotly to reply; but the professor spoke first. "Yes, she had occasional mild delusions."

"Ah!" said the doctor quickly. This was the first time such a thing had happened at Grace Hospital. He grasped at a chance to absolve the institution from accusations of carelessness. "I hardly credited the sleep-walking theory, yet for an adult person to crawl so secretively down a fire-escape at this time of night. . . ." He ended the sentence with a shrug, and did not mention something that had been persistently puzzling him: a lingering remnant of some curious

odor that had greeted his nostrils when he stepped into the room of the missing girl.

"What have you done to locate her?" asked Tholl.

"Nothing. We understood you to say over the phone that nothing definite was to be done till you got here."

"But you have searched the building?"

"Thoroughly. She is not in it."

"Don't be too alarmed by this," said Tholl. "I have little doubt we'll find her at home when we go there to look for her." His voice and face expressed only mild concern. He turned and walked toward the door.

Rick clutched frantically at his arm.

"For God's sake, Professor—" he began.

"Ssh!" hissed Tholl. "You don't want the police in this, do you?"

Rick stopped. Vampires! Dead bodies that talked! Aspen stakes and the black arts! No, he did not want the police in this.

"The affair must be reported to the proper authorities if Miss Rand is not found at once," the doctor called after them.

"Of course," said Tholl. "We will phone you if we don't find her at home. Come, Rick."

FOR a moment the two stood in front of the hospital entrance in frozen indecision. In what festering dark spot in the great city was Priscilla hidden? And how could they move to find and help her?

Tholl's eyes were nearly closed with the concentration of his keen old mind.

"I think," he said at last, "there may be a chance—just a chance—through this dream of yours that came so close to tragedy for us both. From your description of the spot where you got that aspen

stake, it sounds as though it might be Quoy's secret hiding place. Could you possibly find your way there again?"

"I doubt it," despaired Rick. "I visited it only in a hypnotic trance. Hardly once did I glance out the window of the car I went in. The only clue I have is"—he pointed to his knees—"this brownish-red dirt I picked up while there."

Tholl glanced down. Adhering to the dark fabric of Rick's suit were two damp, discolored areas that could only have been caused by his kneeling somewhere in a muddy spot.

"That is all?" said Tholl. "Think! Think hard! Is there *nothing* you remember that might help us guess where this dream place is?"

Rick gnawed at his upper lip. Then a gleam came to his eyes.

"Yes! I remember now! There was something! At the very end of our trip we turned in through high, iron gates. And on the gates, worked in iron, were the letters T. H. C."

"T. H. C.," repeated the professor. "T. H. C. It carries a memory of some sort. . . . Seems as though we should know those letters . . . what they stand for. . . ." He stared at the drying patches of damp earth on Rick's knees. "And the curious color of that dirt! Brownish-red. . . . That strikes a chord, too. . . ."

HE stopped. Then, with a strangled cry, he turned and began running toward a cab that was parked down the street. "Where are you going?" Rick called. "What's up?"

"I'm going for Doctor Quoy!" cried the professor. "T. H. C.—and the color of that dirt! Don't you know? Can't you guess?"

Rick's head snapped back as he, too, caught the significance of the two clues.

"Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery!"

"Yes. We should have guessed it immediately," panted the professor. "The place for death—and Quoy is but death walking abroad—is in a graveyard. And what more likely one than that beside the house with the red roof where we saw. . . ."

"But the chamber I entered was underground!" said Rick, interrupting before the professor could finish. "And I reached it through a subterranean passage! There is no such arrangement at Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery!"

"How do you know?" snapped Tholl. "The ground there is low. There might be an extra large drain to carry off occasional surface water."

Once again they fled through the night in a speeding hired car to the vicinity of Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, the memory of what they had found on their first trip there weighing down the thoughts of each. Once more they passed the graveyard, to conceal their true destination from the driver.

QUICKLY they went to the big iron gate after the car had passed out of sight. It was closed now, that gate. It was past twelve; nearly one o'clock; and no one was supposed to have business there at such an hour.

The stone fence that flanked the road was easily scaled, however; and the two climbed it and returned to the gate, inside the grounds, as their starting point.

"You remember nothing but this gate?" the professor asked. "Nothing at all? Try to recall every move you made."

Furrows appeared in Rick's forehead as he tried desperately to remember the exact course of his nightmare.

"We came in through here. . . . we turned right and then left. . . ."

"That must have been following this lane!" snapped Tholl, point-

ing to a side road that curved right along the fence from the gate, and then straightened out to parallel the center road. "We'll go down it!"

They did, slowly, while Rick strove to remember.

"I seem to recall hearing a heavy ring of metal on masonry. . . . might have been the sound of a manhole lid lifted from a concrete inset. . . ."

"Enough," breathed Tholl. "It was—that!"

He walked through the grass and weeds toward a small circular spot that was bare of vegetation. And this spot, as they got nearer to it, proved to be a rusted iron manhole cover.

Tholl knelt, and put his ear to it. "Listen," he said.

Rick did; and he heard a trickle of water down beneath the lid.

"A drain, even as I thought it might be. It probably runs under this entire section," said the professor. His voice grew hushed, as he added: "This is the entrance! I feel it; I *know* it! This leads to the real hiding place of Quoy—probably the place where Priscilla is now being held. That is, if she is not already—"

"Don't say it!" implored Rick. With a frantic heave, he lifted the heavy iron lid from the clammy cement well it covered. "Come on, let's hurry."

CHAPTER XII

The Vampire's Den

SULTRY black clouds pressed down overhead. A moaning, rising wind tossed the branches of the gnarled trees that dotted the old cemetery. The night was as black as a night can be, and heavy with an approaching storm. Indeed, the first large drops of rain just spattered against their faces as Rick and the professor lowered

themselves into the shallow well beneath the manhole lid.

Down the cement walls they climbed, on iron rungs set in the stonework, to the bottom. There they found two drains, about three feet in diameter, leading away from it. One went out of the cemetery toward the great city main that lined the street. The other led toward the heart of the graveyard.

"This way," said Tholl unhesitatingly, indicating the latter passage.

They started laboriously down. It was more like a tunnel than a drain; a continuous, tiny arched vault of rotting brick, laid before the advent of the more modern hollow tile, resembling in miniature some of the elaborate sewers that underlie many of Europe's cities.

On hands and knees they made their way. The darkness was so thick that they seemed to breathe it, to absorb it in clogged and clammy pores. It weighed on them like a heavy physical load. Rick reflected that he knew now what it was like to be blind, as he crawled on hands and knees down the damp, chill drain.

The path was slightly winding; and here and there the two bumped helplessly against a turning. Also here and there their questing hands sank into mounds of loose earth, where the vaulted brickwork above had given way and allowed the soft dirt to filter through. And once, eternities from the time they had left the well, Rick's fingers encountered something smooth and irregularly round and large, with three jagged holes in it, two of which had once held eye-balls and the third of which had been covered with the flesh and substance of a nose. . . .

ON and on they went, silently, like damned souls doomed to spend the rest of time worming

along a tunnel bored in solid blackness. Only once was the silence broken.

"Do you suppose this may be a trap?" whispered Rick, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and leaving there a smear of dank and musty earth.

"It may well be," came Professor Tholl's voice in the darkness. "But we must go on. . . ."

And on they went, until at last they saw, still far ahead of them, a ghostly greenish light which seemed to exude phosphorescently from the damp brickwork of the drain.

The light grew clearer as they advanced; and then, faintly at first, but growing rapidly stronger, came the loathsome odor with which they were now only too familiar!

Rick stopped, and turned to look at Tholl. He could dimly make out his face now, spectral and distorted in the ghostly greenish light. And he saw in Tholl's eyes the same thought he himself harbored.

Crawling down that horrible passage, they would emerge head first, and utterly helpless, into whatever subterranean chamber lay before them! A child could beat them down before they could rise to their feet and lift cramped arms to defend themselves!

And then, as they hesitated there in fearsome realization of their helplessness, a scream came keening down the passage. A girl's scream; high and imploring and broken with terror.

"Priscilla!" said Rick hoarsely; and he rushed forward on the slippery drain-floor, all thought of risk forgotten, at a speed that left Tholl far behind.

Again the scream burst out—to stop as though sliced through with a knife blade just as Rick got finally to the source of the ghostly greenish light; a cavern-like chamber which looked vaguely, horribly

familiar—the room of his dream!

They had accomplished their first object. They had searched out the final haunt of the evil genius, Quoy, at last. But where was he? And where was Priscilla?

In the phosphorescent light Rick could see no moving thing. Yet that fearful shriek had told of the girl's presence here; and the grisly stench of rotting corruption told with equal certainty of the near presence of the vampire-thing they sought.

Professor Tholl emerged panting from the tunnel and joined him. Warily, the two stood in the center of the cavern, and gazed about them.

THE gruesome vault, deep-buried in the heart of the old cemetery, which Doctor Quoy had hollowed out for his secret hiding-place, was in effect only a widened spot in the drain-tunnel.

It was perhaps eight feet in height, and ten square; the walls, were the raw earth itself, unsupported in any way. Down from the roof, like clutching, gnarled talons, protruded the roots of trees. Through a shallow channel in the floor ran a tiny brook, passing from the drain-mouth opposite the one through which they had just emerged, across the vault and into the exit drain leading down to the circular well. Even as they gazed, this small brook ran faster and became more swollen, hinting that the storm outside had broken in its full fury.

Strange, curved rods of metal, and earthen retorts lay scattered here and there; along one wall was ranged a heavy, wooden work-bench. In one corner was a heap of shriveled herbs. In another corner—

"It may be he's lurking in *there!*" came the professor's tense voice. "Although it is not yet daylight,

and I can't conceive of his being inactive."

Rick caught up one of the curved metal rods and grasped it club-wise. Then he sprang for the thing in the corner—a plain wood coffin with the lid set in place but not screwed down.

His fingers clutched the edge of the lid. He started to raise it. . . .

With every nerve in his body tingling, he threw the lid back and leaped aside with his club raised for a crashing blow. And then he almost dropped it as a shock of surprise, terror and grief flooded through him.

Lying there in the coffin, her cheeks as white as fresh snow and her hands folded over her breast in the pose of death, was Priscilla.

RICK groaned aloud. Priscilla . . . dead! But even as his eyes closed and the world seemed to topple, Professor Tholl brushed past him and started hurriedly to lift her from the casket.

"She's alive!" he said. "Unconscious—but alive! We were not too late."

A mocking voice suddenly sounded, seeming to come from every corner of the vault at once.

"Yes, she lives. You have rescued her, and found me out at last. You have triumphed."

Rick spun about, to glance in all directions for the source of the voice. He saw no trace of its dread owner. Meanwhile, the odor of death had suddenly grown stronger in the place.

The mocking, sinister voice went on: "You have triumphed—if one can call it triumph for the prey to stumble blindly into the trap and find the bait still alive!"

As the words were concluded, there was a dull crash. Rick and Tholl whirled around to see that a heavy iron plate had thudded down to form a tight barrier over the

mouth of the drain into which the surface rain water had been pouring at an ever increasing rate, and from which they had just entered.

The entrance to the trap, now that they were securely inside it, had been duly closed!

"The omniscient Professor Tholl and his lovelorn assistant!" the voice gibed on. "What chance has the humble Doctor Quoy against two such foes?"

The voice had gradually centralized, until now Rick thought it came from the drain entrance out of which the water was flowing—opposite the entrance that had been blocked by the iron plate.

GRIMLY, swinging the curved metal rod in his hand, he started toward the spot. But before his third step had been completed, he found himself rooted to the floor as though the air had hardened into transparent stone around him.

Near the open drain-mouth a shadow suddenly fell. And before Rick could decide whether it was shadow or substance, whether it had come from the drain-mouth or had just materialized out of the air, he found himself staring into Doctor Quoy's jet black eyes and shuddering at the twisted smile on his blood-red lips.

"And so the struggle ends between us, Professor Tholl," Quoy went on. "And in at the death—a purely literal phrase on this occasion—are your stalwart young assistant and the doll-faced girl he sprang so gallantly to rescue. I congratulate you on your victory."

The lips of Tholl moved desperately in incantations designed to paralyze his antagonist as that antagonist had paralyzed Rick. The incantations failed before Quoy's power.

"It will yet be victory!" he panted at last. "Thief and murderer!"

"Thief?" Doctor Quoy broke in suavely. "You are still bitter about my acquisition of the lost Cagliostro, I see. But I am utilizing it properly, whereas you would have played with it as a mere dilettante. Murderer? What would you? You know as well as I how I must derive my sustenance. And you know as well as I that the most effective way of divining the future is by reading the signs to be obtained—only with human sacrifice."

"You fiend from hell!" grated Tholl.

Doctor Quoy bowed ironically, giving never a glance in the direction of Rick, who was straining to break loose from whatever power it was that held him motionless.

"The compliment is treasured for the sincerity with which it is delivered. And now, if you will pardon me, I will leave the three of you to the pleasant finis which lies before you."

YOU cannot touch me!" declared Tholl, drawing himself up. "Small as my power is, compared to the power of the possessor of Cagliostro's knowledge, it is yet sufficient to keep you from laying a finger on me."

"Granted," was the cold reply. "But while I may not have the pleasure of killing you directly, I can see to it that the forces of nature do it for me. Look at the floor!"

Rick's eyes swept downward with the professor's. And at what he saw, and at the significance he read in it, he exclaimed aloud.

The floor was covered with half an inch of water, that had overflowed its shallow trough. Unable to take its usual course through the lower drain entrance, dammed by the iron plate, the water was forming a pool which at every instant grew higher.

"Outside," said Quoy, "a storm

is raging. You may have noticed that it was starting to rain as you entered here? Well, that rain is now a downpour. As you know, all the surface water from this entire low section about here, drains through this vault. If it cannot get out of the vault—but you can guess the rest.”

“May God strike you dead,” shouted Professor Tholl. He sprang toward the mocking figure, splashing furiously in the deepening water. But as he reached Doctor Quoy, the man was no longer a thing of substance. Tholl’s hands grasped futilely at empty air.

A last few words were conveyed to them by the mocking, devilish voice: “I will leave you now. When I return at dawn, to unbar the lower drain and let the water out, I shall welcome with pleasure three new bodies on which to perform certain experiments I have in mind.”

The voice sounded no more. Every instinct told them Doctor Quoy had truly gone.

A moment the two men looked at each other; then, on common impulse, they leaped to the sliding iron plate that dammed the lower drain.

CHAPTER XIII

Trapped

RICK and the professor wrestled with the iron plate, but they could no more move it than shift the solid earth about it. It did not even quiver under their desperate heaving. Only a moment was required to show them that *that* way out of their dreadful predicament was hopelessly barred.

“The other drain!” cried Rick. “Perhaps we can find a way out there.”

They stooped to enter the drain from which the flood was pouring, and splashed a few paces on the

long slant up. But scarcely five yards from the vault, the drain separated into multifarious branches, each far too small to accommodate a human body.

And now a cry sent them hurrying back. They found Priscilla sitting up and staring about her with wondering, fear-filled eyes. The chill water in which she had lain, now covering the floor for three or four inches, had ended her unconsciousness.

“Where are we?” she faltered. “What is this place? Rick—Professor—”

In a few words, Professor Tholl outlined their position. Priscilla went white as death; but she did not faint or grow hysterical. Her courage, proven before, was even equal to this emergency.

“The only two outlets from this vault are the two drains,” Tholl summed up. “The one is barred by the iron drop-door; the other, a few feet away, is too small for even a cat to crawl through. Meanwhile, the water—”

All glanced downward. The water had risen till it was halfway between their ankles and their knees. It seemed to increase in rapidity of rising, too, which was only natural: the furious downpour outside would drain more and more rapidly as the surface earth became saturated and absorbed the falling water less and less easily.

Above them was, probably, twenty feet of solid earth. Around them was Mother Earth itself. About them the flood rose with increasing swiftness. Now it had reached their knees—now almost to their waists.

Priscilla drew close to Rick. Wordlessly, he put his arm around her shoulders. Tholl’s head lowered till his beard swept his chest.

Silently the three waited, while the swirling, muddy water rose high and higher.

SUDDENLY Rick pushed himself away from Priscilla and faced the professor with a wild gleam in his eyes.

"My God!" he shouted, "why didn't we think of it before! We can save ourselves."

Tholl and Priscilla stared at him with the same thought in the mind of each. The strain. . . .

"Easy, Rick," said the professor soothingly. "Don't go to pieces." He laid his hand on the younger man's arm.

Impatiently, Rick shook it off and waded toward the heavy wooden bench, which was just beginning to float free of the floor.

"The other drain!" he cried, his voice so uneven and cracked that Tholl's muscles tensed to protect himself from a possible insane attack. "This bench! The other drain!" said Rick excitedly. "Good heavens! The simplest thing—yet we might well have died for not having thought of it!"

Desperately he tugged the heavy bench toward the drain from which the water poured. "If Quoy can block the one passage, to keep the water in this vault," he explained, "we can block the other—to *keep the water out!* Now do you see?"

The professor did see! With an exclamation, he hurried to help move the bench. They propped it endways against the drain-mouth, and felt with their fingers beneath the surface of the water to see if it fitted flush with the brickwork. It did. Save in a few small places, the wooden planks pressed snugly against the mortared bricks of the drain entrance. But those few places, too, were plugged efficiently: Rick reached out and grasped an armful of the floating herbs and wadded them into compact masses to stop the gaps.

The rush of water was cut off. Very, very slowly, the flood seeped in at minute apertures around their

crude dam; but the three were saved for an indefinite time—as long, probably, as Rick and the professor would have the strength to stand with their backs leaning against the bench to hold it in place. To this small extent, at least, the machinations of Doctor Quoy had been thwarted.

But how were they ever to get out of their ghastly tomb?

PRISCILLA voiced the thought of all: "It seems to me we have only put off dying a little longer. We'll never be able to leave this place, unless a miracle happens."

She looked with faint hope at the professor. But he shook his head. "No my child. I am not able to work miracles. A few things, elementary in themselves but terrifying and inexplicable to those unacquainted with the black arts, I can perform. But to get our solid bodies through these solid walls and to the outer air—that I cannot!"

"Then," said Priscilla simply, "our miracle must come from another source."

And her head bowed humbly, while her lips moved with the words of a childish, almost forgotten supplication her mother had taught her long ago to repeat each night beside her bed. . . .

Hour dragged slowly after hour, while Tholl and Rick leaned grimly back against the bench that kept them from being submerged. With the chill of the water and the monotony of their position, their muscles grew ever more cramped, till even breathing was an agony to them. But they dared not relax. The flood in the ramified drainage system behind them would fill the vault with a rush now, accumulated as it was, if the bench ever slipped.

"A quarter after four," muttered Rick, cautiously freeing one hand and looking at his watch, which he

had put in an upper pocket to keep it clear of the water. "Dawn comes about five o'clock, at this time of year. And with the dawn will come Doctor Quoy!"

PRISCILLA and the professor said nothing. It had not needed Rick's remark to remind them of that. The vampire's parting sentence—that he would return at dawn and find three new bodies for his experiments—continually burned in the brain of each. It happened that he would return to find bodies still alive, but this was a condition he could easily change.

"Unless," said Rick, "we could catch him for one minute off guard."

"We couldn't leave this bench long enough to avail ourselves of the one minute!" Tholl pointed out.

Rick was silent for a moment. "But surely there may be some way . . . something we can do . . ." he insisted.

Priscilla was the next to speak.

"Professor," she said suddenly, "just how much like a normal human being is a vampire?"

"Why, not at all like one," said Tholl, his brows knitting. "A vampire is not alive; it is an undead thing actuated by a living intelligence."

"But its body—it is forced to take nourishment, of a sort, like any other body—"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said the professor. "Well, in its ordinary functions, a vampire's body is much like that of a living, normal person. It feeds in its own ghastly way, and breathes."

"Breathes!" repeated Priscilla, her white face showing sudden eagerness. "Breathes! That's what I was wondering about. Then the vampire, Quoy, can't enter this prison of ours till it's emptied of water!"

The two men gazed at her, wondering what she had in mind.

"I think there's a ray of hope," she said softly. "Doctor Quoy must be sure this crypt is flooded. Before he enters here, he will go through all the motions of emptying it. One of those motions will be—the opening of that iron gate!"

"That's sound logic," commented Tholl.

"What of it?" said Rick dully.

Priscilla outlined more completely the thought that had come to her.

"He will have to open the flood-gate from a distance: that drain leading to the outer world will be a rushing torrent impassable even to him till the flow is over. That means there will be a lapse of several minutes between the time the flood-gate is lifted and the time he enters here!"

"Well?" said Rick, still perplexed.

WELL—suppose we let loose the flood accumulated behind the bench the instant the iron plate is raised. The water will all be drained out, even as Doctor Quoy anticipates. He will come in here expecting to find us drowned. Isn't it possible that he will be careless—off guard as Rick said—and that we can strike some blow against him before he has realized exactly what has happened?"

"Wonderful!" said Rick. "Priscilla, you're a marvel! There's just one thing. . . ." He looked speculatively at the roof of the crypt, judging its height from the floor. "There'll be a lively few minutes in here while the water we're holding behind this bench pours out! It may fill the vault completely for a long enough time to drown us after all!"

"There's no other alternative," snapped Tholl. "If only Priscilla's reasoning is correct, and he will

have to open the water-way. . . ."

Tensely, the three stared at the iron cover that shut off the mouth of the lower passage. They could just see the top of it in the dim greenish light, over the flood that washed around them, and they watched it till their eyes ached. It remained immovable.

"Twenty minutes till dawn," said Rick, moistening his lips.

"He *must* come soon—if he's coming here at all," said the professor.

Wide-eyed, with life hanging in the balance, they stared at the iron barrier.

"Eighteen minutes. . . ." muttered Rick; and then, "fifteen. . . ."

"I think it's moving," whispered Priscilla.

Holding their breaths, they all watched. And it seemed as though a slight ripple showed in the murky water next to the iron plate.

The next instant it was confirmed. All felt a tugging at their ankles and legs as the flood in the vault began to sweep down the lower drain. And the next moment after that they saw the blackness of the passage mouth as the iron plate swung soundlessly up to leave the entrance clear.

IN a few moments the water in the vault had swirled noisily down the tunnel, leaving only shallow pools on the floor under their feet.

Rick glanced at the professor, who nodded.

"Now!" said Tholl. "Find something to hang on to. Anyone who is sucked down into the passage with the flood. . . ."

Simultaneously the two men leaped away from the propped-up bench. It went down with a crash as the surging water behind it jammed forward. In an instant the crypt was a boiling whirlpool, with the three being tossed this way

and that as if they were straws.

"The roots!" shouted Rick.

He had one arm around Priscilla, holding her desperately against the deadly pull of the current. With his free hand he was clutching at one of the largest of the gnarled tree roots that protruded down through the earth of the ceiling. The professor, who had been swept half-way to the tunnel mouth in the first rush of the water, reached up at Rick's call and caught a root. There the three clung, dangling and swaying in the rapid current like three streamers of paper suspended before the gale of an electric fan.

The flood reached up to within a foot of the roof in its first wild rush. Then gradually it lowered its level till the three could drop from the holds of the roots into only a foot or so of water. Finally the crypt was emptied, as was the system of mains behind it. The roaring in the big drain that led to the outside world, diminished to a sullen muttering, and then was stilled altogether. Once more the water splashed in a decorous small brook through the groove cut for it in the floor of the vault.

The crypt was ready for the occupation of the monster who had so painstakingly hollowed it out for a secret retreat from a more normal world.

CHAPTER XIV

Doctor Quoy Returns

"**W**E'LL lie on the floor," said the professor, "as though Quoy's plan had succeeded. Simulate death."

The three stretched themselves out in sprawled, limp attitudes on the moist floor, to wait the arrival of the evil genius that had imprisoned them there. And as they lay there, with eyes closed and the greenish glow shining on faces

pinched and pallid with the chill of the place, they looked indeed like the lifeless corpses it was so imperative that they resemble.

The ordeal of lying helplessly on the floor, waiting for the coming of the dread Quoy, was almost unbearable.

Rick felt that each succeeding second of time must see the end of his endurance—that any instant he must spring to his feet and yell like a maniac to end the suspense. Lying there, just lying there, painfully repressing the shudders of terror and exhaustion and pure chill, with the entire weight of the weedy old cemetery above seeming to press down on him, and with Doctor Quoy somewhere near and creeping closer every moment, was torture far more refined than that of red-hot pincers and rack. And then a positive note crept into the unendurable passivity of their suspense, as, from the mouth of the passageway, came a faint, horrible stench.

For some seconds before Rick could hear anything, his nostrils caught that odor of death, ever growing stronger and more loathsome. Then from down the dripping passage came a faint, dragging sound.

Rick reached out and pressed the arm of Priscilla, who lay like a limp flower beside him. Then he let his arm fall in a lax, dead way to the floor while he watched, through the fringe of his eyelashes, the entrance of the passage.

THE dragging sound grew louder. It puzzled Rick. It sounded as though some sick or wounded thing were dragging itself painfully down the small tunnel. Then Quoy appeared; and at the look and actions of him, Rick could hardly repress a start.

Doctor Quoy was moving slowly, but in a way that showed he was

hastening as rapidly as he could. He moved as though partially paralyzed, hitching arms and legs along as if they weighed him down like lead. On his pale, evil face was a dull, perplexed look; and his eyes had a glazed expression.

With a wild thrill of hope, Rick divined the meaning of Quoy's lethargic movements and his anxious, though tortuous, haste. His one point of vulnerability—the inevitable limitation of the vampire—was clamping down on him. Doctor Quoy had almost been overtaken by dawn, and the near-death of his day, before returning to his underground haunt!

Breathlessly, Rick watched the movements of the crippled enemy. And as he watched, the thrill of hope grew wilder.

Doctor Quoy sighed heavily as he dragged himself to his feet. With an immense effort he stood almost upright. Then, scarcely glancing at the three sprawled bodies on the drenched floor, he stumbled toward the spot where the subsiding flood had stranded the wooden coffin.

What occurred then was simple in itself, but ghastly beyond description in the foul and hideous things it connoted.

Doctor Quoy lifted the coffin lid, sighed heavily again, and lay down in the coffin as if it had been a bed. Slowly the lid sank over him, till with a soft thud it had closed him in.

Quoy the malignant, Quoy the fiendishly powerful, was in his deathly trance and delivered into their hands!

WITH a cry of triumph that rang shrill and cracked in the vault, Rick sprang to his feet and jumped toward the horrible couch of the vampire. The professor reached it with him, and together they pried at the coffin lid.

It was immovable under their fingers!

Rick glanced at Tholl.

A second time they put their backs into the task of lifting the coffin lid. It didn't stir.

They had seen for themselves how it had settled loosely down into place. They had seen before that there were no inside fastenings to hold it down. Formed of a solid, inch-and-a-half plank, it couldn't have weighed more than twenty pounds. Yet it resisted their combined efforts to lift it as though it had been of solid lead and sealed to the box beneath it with steel clamps!

"Beaten . . . again. . . ." said the professor brokenly. He seemed to grow older in that bitter short moment. "Again! And I was so sure. . . ."

"We'll break the damned thing in!" snapped Rick.

He picked up a metal rod and brought it crashing down on the wood. A slight dent appeared in the lid. That was all.

HE raised the rod for another blow. But at this instant something happened that ended completely the faint hope that Quoy could be reached in that oddly impregnable casket of his.

Priscilla leaped away from them, staring with horrified eyes at the mouth of the smaller drain, while scream after scream burst from her bloodless lips.

The two men spun around to look, then shrank back in their turn.

Whether driven out of the rain-soaked earth by the surplus of fallen water, or called in regimental formation by some ghastly, horrible power, a wriggling mass of life filled the smaller tunnel. A writhing mass of earthworms! The drain was choked with them!

Blind, helpless, slow-moving things, they flowed sluggishly into

the crypt in a billowing flood. In a moment they had surrounded the coffin and were rolling and crawling about the feet of the girl and the two men.

"Good Heavens!" Rick gasped. "Look at the things pour out!"

The same vision assailed the brain of each. A second flood, more horrible by far than any tide of water, slowly rising to trap and submerge them in the crypt. . . .

Silently, with their eyes almost starting from their heads, the three plunged into the lower tunnel entrance and began clawing a way toward the outer world. And as they slipped and fought their way along the dripping passage, it seemed to them that the soft helpless things dropped down upon them from the rotting archway above, and started up between the very bricks under their recoiling fingers. . . .

CHAPTER XV

The Golden Noose

DOWNSTAIRS, in the professor's library, the two men sat gazing unseeingly at the wall, each lost in his thoughts.

They had brought Priscilla here to the professor's house, feeling she would be safer here than anywhere else. She was lying upstairs now, sunk in the sleep of utter exhaustion and nervous shock, with a nurse in attendance. Tholl had phoned the hospital immediately on their arrival in the early morning to stop any police investigations they might have started. Then he had got the nurse for her, and he and Rick had fallen loglike into bed to get some rest.

With the first relief of their great fatigue, they had waked again, too tense for normal slumber. That had been at two in the afternoon. It was now nine in the evening, with full night blanketing

the city. In those seven endless hours they had stood guard over Priscilla, and had tried to compose themselves to face whatever might next be their lot to endure from the infamous Quoy.

AT the moment they were in the library for a few minutes of relaxation and talk; they couldn't converse in Priscilla's room for fear of waking her. The nurse—a grim-faced woman who was almost too efficient at her duties—could see that the girl was undisturbed for a little while.

"Quoy will strike to-night," the professor insisted. "When dawn comes to-morrow, either he will be destroyed, or all three of us will be dead. To-night decides all."

"How do you know?" demanded Rick, puffing nervously at a cigarette. "I don't see how you can be so certain."

"It can't be otherwise," interrupted Tholl impatiently. "Consider: we three of all the world know Doctor Quoy's true character and identity. And now—we three of all the world know where he hides in daylight, his last secret den. Don't you see—he's got to strike, and at once, if he would continue to exist himself."

"What do you think will be Quoy's method of attack to-night? Have you any idea?"

"Yes, I have a pretty definite idea, versed as I am along similar lines. I think he will try to get something from this house. Some intimate, personal thing belonging to one of the three of us. Using that as a focal point, he can destroy us from a distance. We might, perhaps, be able to trap him if he tries to steal into this house for some such thing."

Rick got abruptly to his feet. "I think we'd better get back to Priscilla's room," he said with a shiver.

THE two left the library and walked up the stairs. At the head of them they met the nurse, just leaving the girl's room.

"Is she still sleeping?" asked Rick in a low tone.

At this question, the nurse seemed oddly surprised. "Why, yes, sir," she said. "She's as sound asleep as she was a moment ago when you were in her room."

"I? A moment ago?" repeated Rick in amazement. "It's been a half hour since I was in there!"

"I don't understand. . . ." faltered the nurse, looking at him as though she doubted his sanity.

But here the professor spoke, clutching Rick's arm convulsively.

"You saw Mr. Ballard come into this room only a moment ago?" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir. It was less than three minutes—"

"What did he do in there?" demanded Tholl.

"He tiptoed to Miss Rand's side, and snipped off a lock of her hair. I thought it was such a sweet little touch of sentiment."

In utter dismay, Rick and Tholl faced each other.

"He's come—and gone!" said Tholl. "And he has accomplished his purpose while I sat stupidly inactive within forty feet of him! May heaven protect us now!"

Heavily, he instructed the astonished nurse to go to her own home for the night; and, still gazing doubtfully at Rick as though convinced he was not quite sane, she donned her mannish blue coat and left.

"There's nothing more she can do here," said the professor dully to Rick. "Why endanger her life needlessly?"

"You think some general catastrophe may come now—something that would destroy the house and everybody in it?"

Professor Tholl shrugged. "Who

can tell? With that fatal lock of hair in his possession, Doctor Quoy can do many things. Which he will attempt, I have no way of divining."

But they were soon to know.

SLOWLY the minutes passed while the two men sat in Priscilla's room and waited for the final thrust of the evil genius, Quoy. Rigid they sat, as condemned men sit in their hopeless cells, keyed up to the breaking point; while the girl breathed deeply and regularly, still locked in heavy sleep.

The room was dimly lit by a single light bulb. Rick had moved to snap on the overhead lights, but the professor had stopped him with a gesture.

"Why wake her, with a glare of light, to go through these last few moments of suspense?" he had whispered. "Let her sleep as long as she can, poor girl."

So they sat and watched her, listening to her deep, regular breathing.

Rick's quick ears were the first to catch a slight difference in that rhythmic breathing; his eyes were the first to see the alarming change that came over her face, and to discover the dreadful reason for it.

Priscilla's lips parted, and she moved a little in her sleep; her breathing had changed tempo! It became quicker, uneven, with a harsh, stertorous sound. And her face, pale and worn, was suddenly suffused with crimson. After that the delicate skin became oddly mottled. And her throat—

"Professor!" cried Rick, leaping from his chair and plucking frenziedly at something on Priscilla's white throat. "Look!"

Around the girl's neck, biting more deeply every second into her soft flesh, was a single strand of her long golden hair. It was loose, not in any way connected with the

tresses that swept her pillow—one of that lock which Quoy had cut when he entered the room in the appearance of Rick Ballard!

"Help!" Rick implored the professor. "She'll choke to death!"

BUT the professor was already beside him, tearing at that single throttling strand of hair with fingers that shook as badly as Rick's did.

Under their hands, Priscilla did not move. She had passed from sleep to unconsciousness with scarcely a quiver.

With an immense effort—it was like trying to snap tempered steel piano-wire—they broke the fatal golden thread. But instantly, another appeared, to bite even deeper into the soft white flesh.

And then Rick gave a strangled shout, and his hands flew to his own throat. There, too, an almost invisible strand of gold had appeared, to sink into flesh and muscle in a deep thin groove!

For perhaps five seconds Professor Tholl struggled to break the golden noose. Then, realizing that such efforts were fatally useless, he turned and ran from the room, down the hall, and up the steep stairs to the laboratory in his attic.

Two steps at a time, he ascended the stairs, driving his old body to haste till the veins stood out like cords on his forehead. Across the floor of the eery laboratory he leaped, to a shelf where was a small, carefully sealed earthen pot. With this in his hands, he ran back to the bedroom.

Rick and Priscilla were both motionless by now, with their faces dreadfully black and their breaths rattling in their throats. Not stopping to try to unseal the earthen pot, the professor dashed it to the floor. It broke, revealing a thick, gummy substance, like a

heavy salve, that was purplish blue. The result of one of the experiments with obscure, alchemic formulae which Tholl had mentioned to Rick but had not attempted to explain to him—or to any living soul.

Quickly he applied some of the purplish salve to the constricted throat of Priscilla and Rick.

The deadly hairs snapped.

ONCE again Doctor Quoy had been beaten—by a pitifully small margin, it is true, but still beaten—at his own game. But Professor Tholl knew that it was not enough, that such desperate and last moment remedies could not be applied forever. Each blow of Doctor Quoy's—and there would be a relentless and never-ending succession of them—might be the last. They must strike at him first, definitely and decisively, if they could think of a way to do it.

So it was that Tholl left Rick and Priscilla when the girl had drawn the first deep breath of returning consciousness. For he *had* thought of a way in which Quoy might be attacked!

It had come to him like an inspiration while he was in his laboratory; and at once it had presented itself as so logical and possible that he was amazed he hadn't thought of trying it before.

True, it might fail; everything else had failed against Quoy so far. And it meant his, the professor's, almost certain death. . . .

Tholl drew himself erect, and his pace, as he descended the stairs, became almost a martial tread. He was old. His life was nearly done anyway. What if he did sacrifice the few years remaining to him? Faced with a chance, no matter how remote, of destroying at last the dread power for which he was indirectly responsible, he did not hesitate.

His fingers tightened on the most powerful weapon against Quoy that had yet been presented to him—something that had within the hour been in direct contact with the vampire.

Professor Tholl gazed down at the two golden hairs he had taken up when they had fallen from the throats of Rick and Priscilla.

He entered his library and opened a secret drawer. In there was the aspen stake which Doctor Quoy, himself had shaped and sharpened. The vampire, probably never dreaming his plot to trap and kill them in the crypt might fail, had not troubled himself to try to retrieve that stake. Now, by some poetic justice, that fire-hardened point might be plunged into his own chest.

Tholl grasped the stake, and marched unfalteringly to that place he had thought never again to enter—the crude underground chamber in which was hidden the fleshy mantle that had once housed Quoy's intelligence: that body he, Tholl, had done to death in his laboratory two years ago.

CHAPTER XVI

Through the Heart!

THOLL'S mind was icily clear as he marched to his almost certain doom. In the cellar, he debated calmly whether or not he would leave the secret door in the concrete-block wall open for Rick to follow him later. He decided he would. It was taking a desperate chance that in so doing he might let loose an unspeakable horror in the house; but they were taking desperate chances, anyway.

Clutching the aspen stake and the two long golden hairs, the professor went down the dark passage to the chamber in which Rick had first seen an actual example of the practise of the black arts. With

a last deep breath, he flung open the portal and stepped in.

The electric light was still on, as they had left it in their panic-stricken flight days ago, shining with horrible brilliancy on the corpse huddled in a stark heap at the base of the door it had battered against in its insensate attempt to follow the mortals that had disturbed its rest. At this reminder of that last near-catastrophe, the professor shivered. But his mind was still calm and cold.

In the glaring light of the bulb, he took out a pencil and notebook and wrote a few hurried lines. He tore out the page and thrust it carefully into an inside pocket. Rick would find it there, in case there came to pass that which he unshrinkingly anticipated. Then he returned to the task in hand—a brave man about to perform an act of courage no less great for the fact that no one would ever know the supreme fortitude required for it.

AS he had done before, he bent over the stark body in an intensity of mental concentration. After a few minutes of this, he touched the lids of the shrunken right eye with his long, tapering fingers. The lids jerked convulsively; finally opened. The withered eyeball turned in its socket to glare at him.

"I am here," grated the hollow, sepulchral voice. "What do you wish?"

Fine moisture broke out on Tholl's forehead, but he did not falter.

"Spirit of a homeless land," he droned, "fettered to this rotting shell, that is not your own, by the dark will of the one who has wronged you, I wish to set you free at last, and to avenge you by condemning *his* black soul as he condemned your innocent one!"

The dead jaws locked shut with such force that the loose teeth splintered together. The shrunken features worked in a frenzy of rage. The glare in the opened right eye was such that Tholl could hardly endure it.

"What am I to do?" boomed the hollow, dull voice. "Command me."

The professor unclenched his left hand, disclosing the two golden hairs. These he laid over the heart of the corpse in a cross-shape.

"These golden strands," he said, "have but an hour ago been charged with evil by the one we both wish to annihilate. They are thus two-edged swords, deadly to him as to us. Take them, and, armed with the power their recent hellish contact and association gives you—*force that black intelligence back to this frame in which it was born!*"

The hollow voice did not reply. The stiff eyelids jerked shut over the glaring eye. Anxiously, Professor Tholl watched those two golden hairs, laid over the unbeating heart. . .

Suddenly, they were gone.

THE end was swift in coming. Miles away, in a secret crypt twenty feet under the debris of death men call Tynsdale Hollow Cemetery, the sinister figure of Doctor Quoy was bent intently over a lock of long golden hair.

At one moment he was muttering strange words, repeating them from a rune inscribed in faded symbols on an ancient piece of parchment. At the next moment he had fallen, with a wild shriek, to the clammy earthen floor.

The body of Quoy jerked and twitched for a long time in queer and awful spasms . . . then was stark and still.

And shortly after that, the corpse beside Professor Tholl suddenly moved, as though galvanized with an electric current, and sat up.

Tholl backed away from it, the aspen stake raised before him. The corpse got creakily, unsteadily to its feet. And now *both* eyes were open; and from them came a ray light so luridly evil that the impact of their glance was almost a physical thing. No further demonstration was necessary to proclaim that the eery transfer had been made—that the savage intelligence of Doctor Quoy was once more in the body in which it had started its mortal journey.

"Thus far you have won," grated the dull, hollow voice, a voice now subtly, terribly different from that which had first sounded in the shrunken chest. "But if you try what I read in your mind, it will be the last act of your life, Professor Tholl!"

"Nevertheless," said Tholl, and his voice, though shaken, was indomitable, "I shall try—and I will succeed. I will impale your rotten heart with this stake!"

"Fool!" boomed the voice. "Should you do that, you would die as I died. When that point enters my heart in that same instant a psychic point less solid, but no less deadly, shall pierce your own heart. That at least I can accomplish, even in the moment of my own death. And no one knows it more surely than you!"

IN answer, swift and sure, the professor drove for the swaying corpse, even as the bony fingers clamped around his throat.

"No longer am I unable to touch your flesh with mine," rasped the dead voice. "Now will I have the pleasure of killing you with these two hands."

The words ended in a bubbling groan; a groan that rose and swelled terribly to a piercing shriek, and then was stilled.

Tholl had not attempted to tear the throttling, almost fleshless fin-

gers loose. Shaken in the clutch of the gaunt arms, he had yet contrived to arch his body away from the shrunken thing that held him. Then he had placed the fire-hardened point of the aspen stake over the left side of the rotting chest, braced the butt of it against his own breast, and clasped the hideous form to him in an embrace of death.

In and in the stake had gone, till the charred sharp point had thrust with a dreadful soft sound out through the shredding back. And then the creature fell, with the hellish soul of it snuffed out forever.

But with it fell the professor. Quoy had made good his threat, as Tholl had known he would. With the entrance of that point into the long-stilled heart a terrible pain had clamped the professor's own heart. It had pounded once, then stopped. Still locked in the terrible embrace, the two bodies lay motionless on the floor.

IT was so, some hours afterward, with the clean gold of sunrise flooding the world, that Rick found them. And it was there in that underground room that he found and read the last few words Professor Tholl had written and thrust into his inside pocket.

"To Priscilla Rand and Rick Ballard, with a last assurance of peace, I leave all my earthly possessions. I make this last will and testament under the premonition that my life will soon be spent, taken from me by my old enemy, heart failure."

"Heart failure!" repeated Rick to Priscilla, as the two stood looking down at the still figure Rick had brought upstairs and arranged gently on the bed. "Heart failure!"

The sublime irony of it! The cold courage and intelligence that even in that last awful moment could think of attributing approach-

ing death to a natural cause and so spare a world ever hostile to beliefs and creeds beyond its limited comprehension, the bitter truth!

“With a last assurance of peace,” murmured Priscilla. “He conquered, then, and that dreadful Thing no longer exists.”

“Yes, he conquered,” breathed Rick. “Just the look on his face would be enough to tell us that.”

And, a little awed, they gazed at the expression of supreme triumph and content that had erased the lines of agony in the last instant before Professor Tholl had fallen.