

10¢

DIME

MARCH

# MYSTERY

# MAGAZINE



## NECKLACES FOR THE DYING

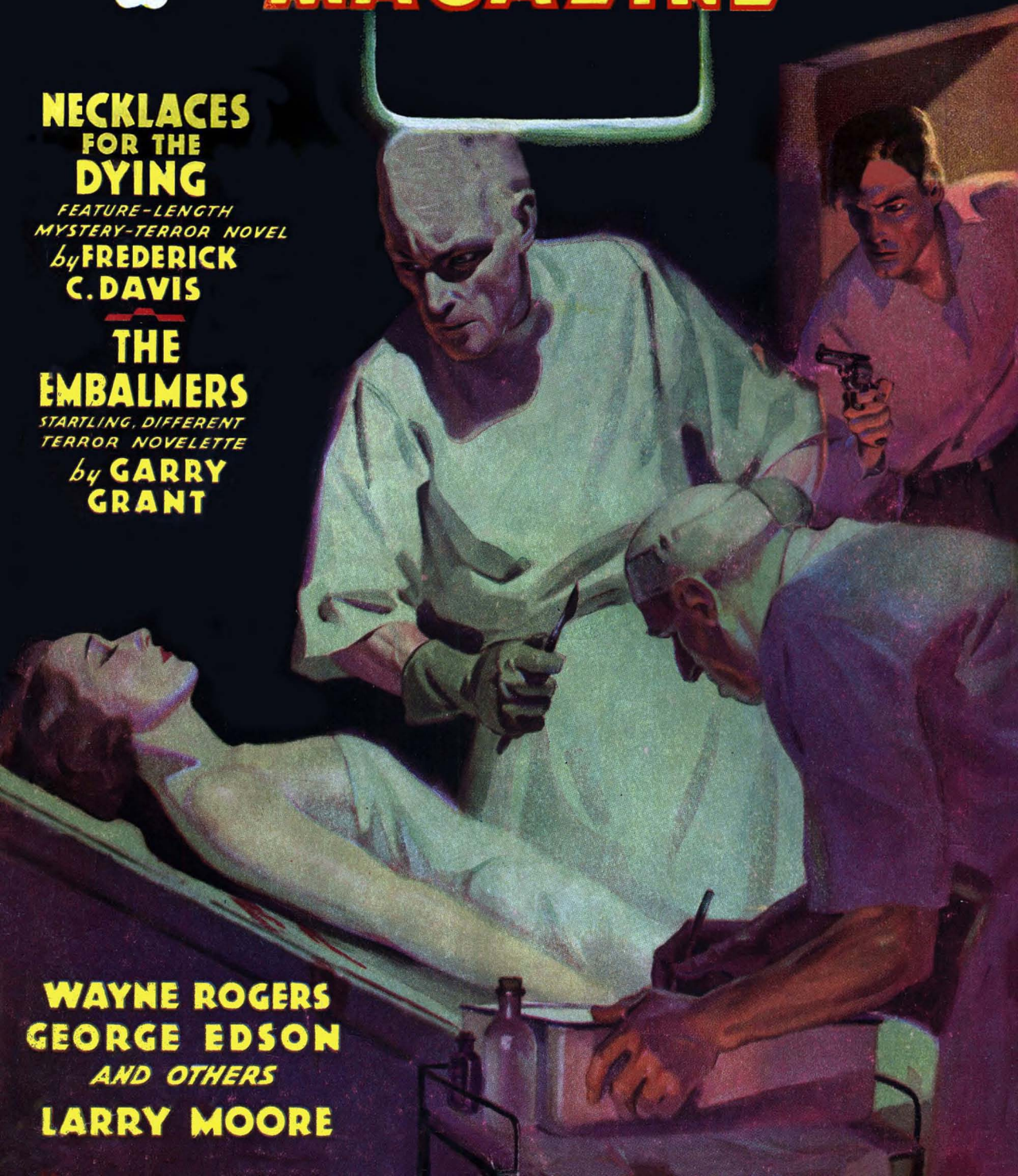
FEATURE-LENGTH  
MYSTERY-TERROR NOVEL

by **FREDERICK  
C. DAVIS**

## THE EMBALMERS

STARTLING, DIFFERENT  
TERROR NOVELETTE

by **GARRY  
GRANT**



**WAYNE ROGERS  
GEORGE EDSON  
AND OTHERS  
LARRY MOORE**

# 10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Volume Ten

March, 1936

Number Four

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Cover Painting by Tom Lovell

Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell

Published every month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter October 6, 1933, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1936, by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscriptions in U. S. A. \$1.00. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.



# THE EMBALMERS



*Marmon stood vigil at the side of the girl whom they had pronounced dead. It was his Bernice they were trying to wrest from him—to consign to the horrible fate of living burial. Was he a mad man, as they claimed? Or was he indeed battling sinister forces that reach beyond the very portals of death for their pitiful prey?*

**D**URING ten hours of fast driving a heightening dread had haunted Marmon—a ghost of fear flying in the wake of the roadster's spinning wheels. Unendurable anxiety tortured him as he weaved up a graveled drive. He slammed the car to a stop and sprang out;

he thrust through the entrance of the rambling house with a name bursting from his lips—the name of the girl he loved. “Bernice! Bernice!”

She appeared suddenly in the library arch, a slender, fragile girl of ethereal, luminous beauty. Suddenly she was in

# By Garry Grant



## A Compellingly Realistic Novelette of Eerie Terror

his arms. Marmon held her close, stunned with relief.

"You're all right, Bernice. Oh, God, it's good to know you're all right." He studied her worried eyes—blue as the space between the singing spheres of the universe—arms crushing her. "I started back as soon as I got your letter. I pictured a million horrible things happening to you. What is it, Bernice? What are you afraid of?"

She whispered: "I don't know. I'm terribly afraid of—of something, but. . . . There's more—much more—than I wrote in my letter. Doug and I have been almost driven out of our minds since—"

The girl's breath caught. Marmon turned sharply. The door had opened. A young man was standing on the sill—Douglas Hartley, Bernice's younger brother. He was white-faced, staring, breath-

ing rapidly as though from a hard run. Inarticulate he stood there transfixed, horror pictured on his clean-cut face—and Marmon was struck sharply by a recollection of the traditional curse that hovered over those who lived beneath this roof.

A Hartley heritage—fear of the most ghastly fate that can befall human life. Bernice's father had narrowly escaped it only to succumb later as though by the relentless machinations of an evil destiny. It had claimed Bernice's three older brothers one after another, with the inexorable certainty of doom. The girl and Douglas Hartley shared it now—a common terror they could not shake. It was the dread of being buried alive.

Something in Douglas Hartley's drawn face, as he stood on the sill, made it seem an imminent, blood-chilling danger. The dread was in Bernice's mind too—it was in Marmon's own, put there by the letter she had written him, which had brought him racing back to this accursed house.

There was silence until Douglas Hartley said huskily: "I came back to get my gun. I saw lights in the cemetery. Someone's there—digging. Someone's opening one of the graves."

He jerked past Marmon and the girl, ran up the stairs. Marmon felt Bernice tremble in his arms. He said quietly: "Doug and I will look into this. He's wrought up—perhaps he only imagined the lights. Stay here, darling. We'll be right back."

The girl's brother bounded down with an automatic target pistol gripped in one hand. He went past Marmon breathlessly, breaking into a sprint as he reached the entrance. Marmon's fingers pressed reassuringly on Bernice's shoulders before he left her. When he hurried past the house, following the path that led deep into the wood, Doug Hartley was running ahead.

THREE of the victims of the Hartley doom lay interred in the little plot at the rear of the vast estate. It could not be seen from the house. The path wound through baffling shadows that cloaked Doug Hartley with invisibility as Marmon followed it. Suddenly Marmon was conscious of quick, light footfalls behind him.

Bernice was following him. She caught his arm breathlessly. "I can't stay back. You don't understand, Grant. This—*this* is what has been driving Doug and me to the point of madness. Listen—listen. Do you hear it?"

A sound was eddying on the stream of the night wind. It was a quick, irregular rhythm—the noise made by a shovel blade driving into solid earth. "Someone's digging in the cemetery," Doug Hartley had said. "Someone's opening one of the graves."

Suddenly there was the sound of a shot—a jarring concussion that shattered the stillness.

"Doug!" The girl screamed her brother's name. "*Doug!*"

She broke away from Marmon. Terror hurried her to the crest of a hill; she was flying down the far side when Marmon saw the light. It was shining deep in the shallow valley, glowing upon a marble monument. Black, raw earth was heaped in front of the stone. A dark cavity marked the site of a desecrated grave.

Another cry broke from the girl's lips: "Mother's!" Then: "Look! That isn't Doug! It's someone hiding—hiding!"

Bernice stopped short, frozen with horror, staring into the gloom beyond the open grave. Marmon, hurrying past her, saw for one brief instant the figure of a man leaping from the shadow of another monument—a man whose face was masked by darkness. The fugitive fired once—a coppery flash of flame—as he darted into obscurity. Marmon stopped, chilled, beside the mound of fresh earth.



Douglas Hartley was lying in the excavation, his chest torn by a bullet—his face covered by spilled dirt that his own fall had avalanched upon him from the edge of the grave. Loam heaped over his eyes and mouth and nose was a mocking portent of the choking death that haunted the soul of every Hartley.

"Doug!"

Marmon dropped into the grave, seized the fallen man's shoulders and raised him. The dirt dropped away from a lax, white face. Doug Hartley's head lolled with the ghastly looseness of death. Marmon straightened grimly, hands reddened by blood that had poured from a bullet-burst heart, gazing appalled at a man who had died in his mother's opened grave—died under a murderer's gun.

"Bernice!"

Uncanny silence lay over the little valley. There was no answer from the girl. Marmon snatched up a flashlight that lay on the mound. He hurried across the cemetery, chilled by apprehension for the girl, cutting the beam into every shadow.

"Bernice! It's Grant. Where are you?"

Silence—no answering voice. The only sound was Marmon's quick steps. Headstones stood like frozen ghosts inscrutably keeping their secret as he wound through them.

"Bernice! Bernice!"

A wailing sob came out of the darkness. Marmon was startled by a rustle of branches. The flashlight beam revealed Bernice Hartley running—running madly, blindly, from unendurable horrors. Marmon sped after her. He was the man she loved, yet the sound of his swift steps increased her frantic haste.

He bounded to cut her off, gripped her arm. She shrank from him, lips trembling, eyes widened with terror. "Bernice! Don't you know me? It's Grant." Abruptly, desperately, she flung herself into his arms.

"Grant! Take me away! Take me away!"

"Listen, Bernice. It's all right now. He's gone." She was sobbing, her hot breath beating on his cheek. "Did you see the face of the man with the gun? Bernice!"

"Yes."

"Who was he? Answer me!"

"It was—"

Suddenly she was utterly limp in Marmon's arms. Her hands dropped. Her head lolled. A deep sigh came from her lungs as her every muscle went loose. Marmon pressed her close, anxiously looking into her face—a face white as death.

"Bernice!"

He lowered her to the ground. "She's fainted, that's all," he told himself frantically—but he was mocked by a ghastly dread. He pressed his ear to her breast—a breast unmoved by the slightest breath. For a long moment he remained frozen, stunned by the horrible truth.

No whisper of life came from her heart.

## CHAPTER TWO

### To Claim the Dead

HOURS had passed since Marmon had returned to the house carrying the limp body of Bernice in his arms. He had immediately called Dr. Fawcett, the family physician, and he had telephoned the police. He scarcely remembered submitting to the questioning of the detectives who had come from headquarters. All the while he had been thinking of the letter Bernice had sent him. Now an unconquerable conviction filled him, reflecting in his eyes as he gazed at the three others in the library—a conviction that he had not lost Bernice.

Dr. Fawcett was standing at the fireplace, shaggy head bowed. Stanley Brain-

ard, thin and small-eyed, the step-father of Bernice and Doug Hartley, had a reticent, even furtive, manner. He enjoyed a small income from the Hartley estate, was rather an ineffectual fixture of the place—and because of his taciturnity, something of an enigma.

Miss Caroline Brainard, his sister, a sentimental spinster, had, following Letitia Hartley Brainard's death, some four months ago, come to the house to live.

The room was hushed until Marmon said: "You're wrong to mourn her. She is not dead."

Dr. Fawcett came to him quietly. "My boy, you must realize her heart was not strong. She was hysterical just before it happened. Cardiac failure, my boy—but please don't insist—"

"She is not dead."

Dr. Fawcett winced. Stanley Brainard turned a protesting gaze upon Marmon. Caroline Brainard took alarm at his sharp tone. Marmon's shoulders squared as he went on:

"She's asleep—sleeping a sleep so profound you can't distinguish it from death—but she'll soon waken. Doctor, you're a man of science. It's not only possible, it's happened many times before—once in this very family."

"My boy, my tests show—"

Marmon interrupted: "Call it what you like—cataleptic sleep, suspended animation, the death trance—it is not death. It's happened to Bernice exactly as it happened years ago to her father."

"That must have been different, my boy," the doctor said.

"How can you know?" Marmon challenged. "You weren't the Hartleys' doctor then."

Marmon recalled an episode that was unforgettably fantastic yet as real as death itself. Craven Hartley, a high-strung man who worked under terrific nervous pressure, had been found slumped at his

desk, and the physician who was then attending the family, Dr. Roberts, had announced that he was dead.

Marmon vividly remembered the hearse drawing to the door, and Simon Calder, the undertaker, retiring to the room where Craven Hartley lay. A moment later Calder had burst out of the room, face sheety-white, palsied with consternation. They had crowded in to see Craven Hartley gazing at them, smiling, rising from the bier.

"What is the matter?" the "dead" man had asked.

Months later, victim of a grimly ironical fate, Craven Hartley had been killed in a mine cave-in in Pennsylvania—*buried alive*—but only the grace of God had saved him that night from the poison that would have seeped through his veins from Simon Calder's embalming receptacle.

Marmon said quietly: "Dr. Roberts explained it quite fully. Cataleptic trance has been known since the beginning of history. It follows a long illness, or an over-wrought condition—a supreme effort of nature to rest exhausted nerves. That night Craven Hartley was enjoying a profound, refreshing sleep, with all vital processes relaxed to such low ebb he *seemed* to be dead. It is the same now with Bernice. She is not dead—only sleeping."

The physician began: "My boy, you're too stunned to realize—"

Marmon removed a letter from his inner pocket—the letter Bernice had sent him, which had stirred such a persistent dread in his heart—a fear now a thousand times magnified. He handed it silently to Dr. Fawcett.

Grant, darling,

I'm frightfully worried, so worried I can't sleep, can't rest, can't think of anything but one ghastly thing. I'm afraid, terribly afraid, that the horrible thing that

happened to Father will happen to me—soon.

The day after you left, Doug and I went for a drive. We met a gypsy caravan. A toothless old hag looked at my palm, then stared at me in the most uncanny way. She said:

“Your family is cursed with the fate of being buried alive.”

I couldn't speak—because you know how horribly true it is. I had never seen this gypsy witch before. She knew nothing about me, except what her supernatural vision told her. She trembled as she held my hand, and went on:

“You will die as your father and your brothers died. It will happen soon. Destiny wills it.”

Then she ran from me. Her prophecy has been haunting me night and day. She only spoke the dread that has been in my own mind for years but now it has become a frightful obsession. Darling, you must understand, and must make me a promise.

Whatever happens to me, don't let them bury me until you are certain I am dead.

Bernice.

MARMON said quietly: “Craven Hartley died the horrible death of being buried alive. Bernice's oldest brother, Julian, superintending the excavations for the Lincoln Bridge, was caught in a landslide, and when they dug him out he was dead. Kendall, wandering through the West the next year, was thrown from his horse, into a bed of quicksand, and he was never seen again. Everett, foreign correspondent of the *Times*, was caught in an earthquake in Tokio and trapped in a collapsing building. Buried alive, all of them! Now Bernice—Bernice is sleeping, but you won't believe it's only that—you want to treat her like a corpse.”

Dr. Fawcett and Stanley Brainard and his sister were staring.

“God in Heaven, it's what Bernice has been dreading day and night for years! Added to that, the horror of the thing that happened to her father—a fear of being believed dead while she still lives,

the dread of being thought a corpse *and made one!*”

Marmon straightened. “I've made Bernice a promise. I'm going to keep it. I'll let no one touch her until I am sure the spark of life is gone. But she's not dead now. I know she's not dead.”

His exhausted nerves sent a surge of dizziness through his brain. He climbed the stairs, passed the room where Bernice was lying so silently, went into his own. His mind hummed over and over, “She's not dead—not dead—” and yet God knew he was not sure.

He heard the sound of a motor outside the house. Quiet voices spoke downstairs, but he did not stir. Soft footfalls in the hallway aroused him. Suddenly Marmon jerked out of his chair, heart pounding with frenzied alarm. Bernice's door was standing open.

He rushed into her room and stopped in a paralysis of horror, staring at the two men who were bending over the bed. Bernice was lying on it, her eyes closed, her face placid, her lips waxen. Marmon had left her fully dressed, but these two men had begun to remove her clothing. They had thin, preying hands, and cadaverous faces—like evil angels of Death who had come to claim their bounty.

Marmon thrust them back, straddled between them and the girl on the bed. “Don't touch her!”

Simon Calder, the undertaker who had prepared the bodies of four Hartleys for burial in the family cemetery, blinked his amber eyes. He said in a husky whisper: “I was called by Doctor Fawcett. I've come to take her away to my—”

“She's not dead!” Marmon snapped. “Do you understand that? She's sleeping, that's all. If you embalm her now you'll murder her with your damnable poisons. You saw one Hartley rise from the dead, Calder. I promise you you'll see another.”

Arthur Dotey, Simon Calder's rabbit-



toothed assistant, moved toward the door. "I'll speak to the family, sir."

Marmon stared at the open black case on the chair—at ghastly things inside it used to make the preliminary preparations for embalming. He thrust Dotey into the hall, gripped Simon Calder's lapel.

"Get out of here, both of you! Get out of this house! I won't let you touch her!"

They recoiled from the fierceness of his eyes. Calder caught up the case of horrors and retreated down the stairs with Dotey. Marmon did not move while confused voices sounded in the library—not until the entrance closed. Through the window, he saw a shining black hearse rolling away.

He turned quietly to the bed. The girl lay horribly still, her bronze hair splashed on the pillow, her cheeks white, her lips faded. There was no breath from her exquisitely carved nostrils, not the slightest sign of life in her heart.

"Bernice," he whispered. "Bernice, darling—sleep—rest."

He turned out the lights and left her lying in the darkness. He closed the door quietly. Grimly he turned the key and kept it in his cold, clenched hand.

**M**ARMON went into Doug Hartley's room. Remembering that Bernice's brother had owned two pistols, he sought the other. He took it from a drawer. Grimly he tucked it in his belt and buttoned his coat.

He was turning away when Caroline Brainard came to the sill. "Lieutenant Carmody is here from police headquarters, Grant. He wants to see you."

Marmon tried Bernice's door, to make sure it was fast, before he went down. Carmody was a towering, broad-shouldered Irishman with sympathetic eyes. They sat facing each other near the fireplace, while Stanley Brainard and his sister stood by. The detective said quietly:

"I've read your statement, Mr. Marmon. This is very trying for you, I know, but we must have more information. The bullet passed completely through young Hartley, and we haven't found it. There are no clear footprints. Whoever did this thing—"

"Bernice saw the murderer," Marmon pointed out. "She will be able to identify him beyond all doubt."

Carmody started. "But—she's dead."

"She's not dead. She's only sleeping. She will waken soon."

The detective blinked. "All this is damned strange, you know," he resumed. "Have you any idea why someone began to open Mrs. Brainard's grave?"

"I believe Bernice knows," Marmon said. "Perhaps it won't be long. When she wakens she'll tell you with her own lips."

"But—she's dead."

Marmon jerked up. "She's only sleeping. How many times must I tell you? Can't you hear—can't you understand? She's not dead—only asleep."

Carmody muttered: "Yes—yes, of course. Mr. Marmon, it is most unfortunate to our case. We haven't a single clue pointing to the murderer. You declare you are unable to identify him. Only Miss Hartley saw his face, and now she's—" He broke off in confusion.

"I understand," Marmon answered, "Bernice's identification is the only possible means of pinning the guilt on the murderer. She must point him out or he will never be caught. I intend to do everything possible to help bring the guilty man to justice—that's an added reason for safeguarding her while she's sleeping, Lieutenant. But it's only a question of time. She'll waken soon."

Carmody muttered a good-night, bewildered dismay in his eyes. When he was gone, Marmon faced Stanley and Caroline Brainard.

"No living person other than Bernice can point out the man guilty of murdering Doug. Did you hear that clearly? No *living* person but Bernice. I'm going to watch her, day and night, until she revives and speaks his name. . . . You think I'm mad, don't you? They all think I'm mad. That doesn't matter."

Marmon left the library, his mind reeling with nervous exhaustion. He stopped at the door of Bernice's room and again made sure it was fastened. The key was in his pocket. He turned to Doug's study because it was directly across the hall and from it he could watch Bernice's door.

He went in slowly, wryly eyeing the bed. There was no dead body lying on it. They had taken Doug to the dank, odorous morgue—as they wanted to take a living, sleeping girl to murder her, officially and stupidly, on a cold, slimy slab.

A hush had settled in the house. Marmon sank wearily into the desk chair. He turned aching eyes on the littered blotter. A sealed legal-size envelope was lying under the light. Startled, Marmon saw his name scrawled across it in Doug's flowing script. He snatched it up, ripped it, drew out a closely typed page.

Dear Grant,

I am writing this in case something happens to me. I am filled with a dread that my mind may fail or—

A spidery chill crawled along Marmon's nerves. An indefinable noise had crossed the hall. From Bernice's room. It came again—a rustle of movement behind the locked door. A sound that made Marmon hope, desperately, crazily, that the girl he loved had risen from the living death.

Carefully he toe-tipped to the door—carefully because he remembered a warning of old Dr. Roberts, dead now these several years, that a shock at the recovery stage might mean eternal death for Bernice. His heart hammered wildly as he

slipped the key into the lock. His breath stopped as he turned it. He opened the door a crack, without sound—and stood paralyzed with icy horror.

A shadow was bending over the girl on the bed—the silhouette of a hunched man with one arm upraised, his hand gripping a long-bladed knife. A glow on the opposite wall outlined him sharply—a phantom being poised to plunge the gleaming weapon into Bernice's heart!

**T**HE point of the blade glinted downward as Marmon broke the icy rigidity that held him. He jerked the automatic out of his belt as he shouldered in. The thump of the flying door quickly turned the man at the bed. He was a faceless shadow, crouching to spring. With savage swiftness he leaped on Marmon, the knife slashing. An instant before the black body collided with his, Marmon fired.

The horror of the sight had slowed his finger. The impact of the fighting man sent the bullet into the wall. He struck out desperately, warding off the arm that was driving the blade downward. Twisting away, he warned himself that he must not shoot again because he might hit Bernice—Bernice, who was not dead but only deeply sleeping—but the man with the knife came after him with jungle ferocity.

Marmon gripped the wrist that held the weapon, and felt the fabric of a glove. He was leaning down, striving to wrench the blade away, when a fist exploded against the side of his head. He tumbled to the floor, the world spinning around him, aware of frantically swift movements in the gloom. He glimpsed a shadow on the sill of the window—a black image that instantly vanished.

Marmon pulled himself up while excited voices echoed downstairs. A crash sounded before the open window, then running footfalls. Automatic ready, Marmon thrust his head out. A trellis rose

against the wall beside the window—the means by which the assailant had entered. The darkness below was tempered by the shine of the entrance lantern, but it was a dim, baffling glow that revealed nothing of the escaping man. Marmon turned back, slapping the window down, and stopped, gazing in consternation at the girl on the bed.

He snapped on the lights to see that she had not moved. The crack of the automatic had not disturbed her. Her eyes were still closed, her face still placid, her lips waxen. The sheet had been pulled back to bare her breast for the plunge of the knife—a breast unstirred by any perceptible breath.

He forced himself past her, out the door. He turned the key in the lock before he bounded down the stairs. Caroline Brainard was in the lower hall, staring in bewilderment. The entrance was open. Marmon, hurrying out, caught a dark movement near a group of blue spruces, and sprang toward it. The man who twisted, gasping, out of his grasp was Stanley Brainard.

"What're you doing out here?" Marmon demanded.

"I heard a noise. What in God's name happened? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I'm not the only one who thinks Bernice is alive. Someone else believes it—the man who just tried to kill her."

Brainard stared inarticulately into Marmon's fierce eyes. Marmon ran along the garden path, circled back to the entrance. There was no sign of the fugitive in the darkness. He had vanished as swiftly, as completely, as the murderer of Douglas Hartley had disappeared from the sheltering shadow of the tombstone.

Marmon thrust past the ashy-faced Brainard, climbed the stairs, paused at the room of the girl he loved. He unlocked the door quietly, stepped in. The change-

lessness of the girl on the bed struck cold dread into his heart. He bent over her, called her name softly, but her waxen lips gave no response. In despair he turned away, his eyes aching—and he saw the knife.

It was lying in the center of the room, where Marmon had fallen—a curved blade, needle-pointed, razor-sharp. Marmon's blood pounded hotly as he covered his hand with his handkerchief, took its carved ebony handle into his fingers. Quickly he left the room, locking the door behind him.

At the end of the hall he thrust into the room occupied by Stanley Brainard. It was cluttered with relics from the four corners of the earth—spears, swords, shields. Directly over Brainard's desk a copper scabbard was hanging. It was the sheath into which this curved murder blade fitted.

Marmon's jaw-muscles bulged as he went down the stairs. He strode directly to Brainard at the fireplace. He said tightly:

"This is yours. It came from your room. I got it away from the man who tried to kill Bernice."

Brainard blurted: "Kill her? She's already dead. You must be mad!"

Marmon went on grimly. "There must be a reason why you insist Bernice is dead. She and Doug had a quarter million each, left them in trust, by their mother. There is no doubt of Doug's death. His share goes to Bernice if Bernice is living. She's the last of the Hartleys and if she dies, the estate goes to you, Brainard, by the terms of the will."

Brainard choked: "In God's name, you can't think me capable—"

"You love luxury. You've stayed in this house since Letitia's death, reveling in its comforts. You like to satiate yourself with rich amusements on the sly. But she didn't leave you much—only a modest

income. Not enough—is that it, Brainard?"

"You can't say that!"

"You began to think, 'Perhaps Bernice is still alive.' That one vital fact would keep half a million out of your hands. You thought, 'Everyone else believes she's dead and they think Marmon is mad—I'll make sure.' Perhaps a little bribe paid to Simon Calder would keep everyone from learning about the knife-wound. One hard thrust, into Bernice's heart, and you'd be *sure* of the half million, Brainard!"

Brainard snapped: "You don't know what you're saying!"

Marmon said grimly: "There is one thing we must not forget. Bernice saw the man who killed Doug. That's why he came back to make sure she would never live to identify him—but she will. She'll speak his name. She'll rise to name the murderer."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Drug of Doom

A SOFT knock echoed in the room where Bernice Hartley lay uncannily still, where Grant Marmon sat a grim sentry at the portals of doom.

A day of torture had passed—and now the beginning of another night of torment. Marmon had not opened the bolted door. He had not eaten, had not slept. All the while the girl had lain motionless, shrouded with silence—silence disturbed now by the rap on the door.

"It's Caroline," a quiet voice said. "You can't keep this up, Grant. If you insist on staying there to watch her, perhaps you'd like coffee. I've brought some. Please open the door."

Marmon pulled himself up. He braced the door with his foot as he opened it. He put trembling hands on a silver tray

bearing a pot of coffee and a cup. "It won't be long—I'm sure it won't." At once he shot the bolt.

"Grant, won't you come out?" Caroline asked through the panels. "Won't you lie down and rest?"

"Rest!" Marmon snapped. "The moment I close my eyes they'll come for her like vultures. I can't let myself sleep."

He poured the cup full of steaming coffee and gulped it down. It seemed weak and strangely acrid, but Marmon took a second cup and a third. He gazed tenderly at the girl on the bed who lay so still. He had begun to dread to turn his eyes upon her. "The one infallible test of death," he had read it somewhere—the words haunted Marmon. "The putrefaction of the body. . . ." Marmon tore his eyes away. . . .

The coffee was having no stimulating effect on him. Instead, he found it harder to fight off sleep. . . . The letter Douglas Hartley had written. Marmon drew it from his pocket. He had read and reread it, feeling that somewhere between its lines the answer to the murder riddle lay—an enigma which only Bernice could answer. His aching eyes jerked from word to word as he strove again to solve its riddle.

. . . I am filled with a dread that my mind may fail, or that the doom of the accursed Hartleys may claim me.

You remember Dad's wedding gift to Mother, the diamond necklace which Dad had made according to his own design. Mother loved it so much she stipulated in her will that it was to be buried with her. We all saw it at her throat when the lid of the casket was bolted down. We know the necklace went with her into her grave.

Marmon shook his head to clear his senses. Fatigue was spinning a blinding web before his stinging eyes. He forced himself to read on:

The next day after Bernice became so .



upset by the gypsy's prophecy—she and I went to dinner at Mrs. Marston's. Mrs. Marston's house guest was Mrs. Livermore, from Chicago. Bernice and I kept staring at the diamond necklace Mrs. Livermore was wearing. It was Mother's—we kept telling ourselves it was impossible—but we knew it was Mother's.

We asked Mrs. Livermore polite questions. She had bought the necklace from a reputable jeweler. When she allowed me to examine it more closely, I looked at the clasp. Mother had had hers engraved—"C to L." I was almost delirious with relief when I saw the clasp of Mrs. Livermore's necklace was not inscribed at all. But then she explained:

"I had the clasp replaced when I bought it. The original was initialed—'C to L,' I think."

Understand, Grant, the necklace itself is not the vital thing to us. It *was* Mother's but now it is, somehow, rightly Mrs. Livermore's. To Bernice and me it was an indication of something else, the symbol of a fear striking at the very roots of our minds. We kept asking ourselves, "What has happened, what has happened?" Somehow we must learn the answer or else we'll go mad.

The page was blurring before Marmon's eyes. He fought the numbness that was enveloping him and stared at the swimming words.

You remember, Grant, how profoundly Mother was disturbed by Dad's "death"—how she dreaded the same horror happening to her. She made us promise that, when the time came, and she seemed to have died, we would not permit her body to be embalmed. We granted her wish, and waited until at last we were sure, and we were sure when we buried her. Yet—is she lying there in her grave now? Or was she still alive when her casket was lowered into the grave—and did someone know it—and was she, somehow, disinterred—and is she alive now, somewhere in this world, hidden from us by a secret cloud that rose with her at her resurrection?

The necklace—we always come back to the necklace. What does it mean? How can it exist in the land of the living while Mother remains in the realm of the dead? That

is the thought torturing us. Is Mother dead and in her grave, or is her coffin empty?

Marmon's head was whirling. He opened the window, drew deep breaths. The fresh air cleared his senses a little.

Bernice and I have desperately tried to think it out logically—but there is no logic. There is only the horrible conviction that our dead is not dead, that the grave is vacant. Yes, we tried. First we questioned Simon Calder.

"You saw the necklace at her throat when I closed the casket," Calder said, "and you remained with her until the grave was filled."

We even dared confront Stanley Brainard. "Was the necklace we buried with Mother the real one?" we asked him. "Had artificial stones been substituted without Mother's knowing the difference?" It was tantamount to accusing him of theft and, of course, he denied it. Yet I wonder—

Marmon blurted: "God! I can't let myself break now. They're waiting—waiting for it. If I let myself go, they'll take Bernice away. They'll kill her—kill her with their stupidity—if I don't keep hold of myself."

Wonder—horrible uncertainty—it is consuming our minds. We can't endure it any longer. The only way we may be sure is to open Mother's grave, yet God knows we can't do that. Whether her casket is empty or whether she is lying in it—God help us—will we ever learn?

Doug.

MARMON groped to the door, gazing in despair at the girl lying so still, so white on the bed. Bernice's mother had lain like that, day after day, while her tortured children waited for the certainty of her death—certainty that now, months later, a dead son was questioning. Perhaps Bernice would never rise. Perhaps hers was the sleep of eternity. Perhaps . . .

Marmon tried to make no sound as he

turned the key in the lock and went along the hallway. Quietly he entered the room that had been Letitia Brainard's. It was musty as if filled with the breath of a tomb. Scarcely able to find his way to the desk, Marmon fumbled an old scrap book from a drawer and turned to a photograph of a diamond necklace.

A ragged line of type on the yellowed clipping announced that this halftone pictured Craven Hartley's wedding present to his wife. The highlights grew blindingly bright in Marmon's eyes, moved and danced before him, bewitched things swirling like storm-torn constellations—stars waltzing through cosmic space black as all eternity. Profound darkness poured into Marmon's mind. . . .

Far, far away he heard footfalls and voices—sounds from another world—as he strove to rise, but he could not move. An interminable period passed—ages and eons—before he felt volition returning to him. When he forced himself up unsteadily the footsteps and voices were gone—the house was hushed.

He started toward Bernice's door—then, a sob breaking from his lips, he flung himself forward. Her room door was standing open! He stumbled in, staring at the bed where she had lain—a bed now empty. He shouted "Bernice!" as he swayed to the window and stared down to see fresh tire tracks in the driveway. "Bernice!" as he twisted back in terror.

He stopped short, staring at the silver coffee pot standing on the tray. A cold suspicion helped clear his mind. A trickle of the dark brew remained in it—and a half-melted tablet. He propelled himself out of the room as quick footfalls came up the stairs.

He gripped Caroline Brainard's shoulders. "Where is she? Where have they taken her? You drugged me—you put something in my coffee so you could steal her away—"

The woman sobbed: "Please, Grant. You were on the point of collapse. It was just a few sleeping tablets. We were sure about Bernice—it was too horrible—you were driving yourself mad—"

"You fool, you fool!" Marmon shook the woman. "Where is she? *Where have they taken her?*"

"It's too late, Grant!" she screeched. "Simon Calder took her away. Do you hear? It's too late!"

Marmon sped down the stairs, jerked out the entrance, ran reelingly to the garage. He fell into his roadster, twisted blindly at the ignition, kicked at the starter. With the engine roaring he whirled down the drive, hurled the car into the boulevard. In insane haste he started toward the mortuary of Simon Calder.

*"It's too late!"*

Pavement flowed under the headlights in a blurring stream. It was a delirium, long and maddening, while Marmon flew interminably through empty space. Yet, the cold rushing wind cleared his brain and when he drew near the amber lighted house he acted with consummate caution.

The mortuary was a somber dwelling of the dead shrouded by the funereal glow of its chapel windows. Marmon stole toward a shining black hearse which sat backed to broad doors at the rear. The hearse was open and empty. Marmon crept to a door set in a whitewashed wall. He brought the automatic into his hand as he stepped into a cement corridor that was cold and reeking with the scent of death.

Behind another door movements sounded, lowered voices spoke. With the utmost care Marmon turned the knob and opened a crack. He looked into the embalming chamber.

Two men were at work near an enamel table—Simon Calder and Arthur Dotey. They were adjusting a tank full of preservative fluid, uncoiling rubber hose. A

sharp surgical implement was in Calder's hand as he bent forward—a blade used to open the veins of corpses for the admission of the embalming poison. He half turned away and Marmon saw the nude girl on the slab—Bernice.

"Don't touch her!"

THE men jerked up, twisting around. The knife, dropping from Calder's hand, rang on the cement floor. Dotey retreated, his face whiter than that of the girl. Marmon's gun covered them as he made sure, swiftly, that the keen edge of the knife had not yet marred Bernice's smooth skin. He straightened grimly when Calder said acidly:

"If you don't go, you'll suffer for it."

Marmon felt along the wall, twisted a knob, opened a closet. It was cluttered with the ghastly appurtenances of the embalming chamber. He stepped to the side of the table where the girl lay, his gun waving. "Get in there, both of you," he ordered. "I swear to God I'll shoot you if you don't."

The two men retreated into the closet. Dotey was quaking with fear. Simon Calder's narrowed eyes gleamed venomously. Marmon blotted away their faces with the door, dragged a chair close, braced it under the knob. Then he turned to the girl who lay naked on the table, still and cold.

Marmon brought a robe from the hearse and whipped it over her. He lifted her in his arms, a waxen, limp burden. He carried her out of the chamber, through the darkness, to his car. As he placed her tenderly beside him, he realized that Calder and Dotey were even then striving to break out of the closet, that a few seconds might bring the police.

The hot motor caught at once. Marmon cut sharply from the curb, seeking dark streets, traveling swiftly as he dared, the

name of Bernice on his lips—unspoken because she could not answer.

"But she isn't dead . . . she isn't dead."

When Marmon turned down a rough dirt road, an eternity later, a lake rippled in the beams of his headlamps. He braked at a log cottage by the water's edge. The air was cold and the camps, Marmon knew, were deserted by their summer tenants. He had often swum here with Bernice, and canoed in the moonlight.

He broke the lock. He took her into his arms and carried her into the deep gloom inside. He placed her on a bed, wrapped the robe snugly around her, looked long at her white, still face.

"Rest, Bernice—rest, darling."

He left her in the silent darkness, his heart as cold as hers, and drove away alone.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Ghoul's Gamble

THE private cemetery of the Hartleys lay hushed among the pines, its sighing serenity disturbed only by the mournful calling of owls. The grave of Letitia Hartley Brainard yawned in the darkness, untouched since the body of her murdered son had been lifted from its shallow depths.

He had wound his way along unfrequented back roads, had descended into the valley of the dead while avoiding the house. Cautious that men from headquarters might be standing guard, he listened to every furtive night-sound. Sure at last he was alone, he went with slow, quiet steps to the half-opened grave.

The shovel used by Douglas Hartley had been taken away by the police, but Marmon had brought another, small and collapsible, from the kit of his car. He lowered himself into the grave. He drove the blade into the earth and worked with-

out a light, listening tautly, his nerves burning with anxiety.

Bit by bit Marmon deepened the cavity. His every sense snapped to alertness when the steel struck something hard with a hollow muffled sound. He felt a damp board—the lid of the coffin of Bernice's mother.

Each scrape of the shovel over the wood seemed to rasp along Marmon's spine. He brought a heavy screwdriver from his pocket and worked at the fastenings of the cover—an exhausting, awkward ordeal. He struggled up, pried the lid loose, heaved it out of the hollow. The casket of Letitia Hartley Brainard lay exposed.

Marmon plied a wrench at the bolts of the headpiece, panting with the effort. Sharp, creaking sounds, the protest of rusty metal aroused an echoing stir among the trees. One by one Marmon loosened the studs, twisted them free. He fingered at the hinged section, bracing with all his strength, lifting it.

He paused, nauseated by the fetidity that swirled around him. Thought of facing the thing that lay beneath him now—or the emptiness that would mock him with a greater mystery—was an almost unbearable pain. He forced himself little by little toward the inevitable moment. The light gleamed.

One short moment, then it was out. Marmon kept his position, stunned with the certainty that he could never forget the thing he had seen. It was not a face, nothing that could ever have been human—but it was there. The light had revealed, in repellent horror, all that was left of a woman who had met the infallible proof of death. And in the bright shine, during that incredible moment, the stones of a necklace had twinkled.

Marmon reached into the casket. His soul revolted while he strove to find the necklace. He groped in darkness, fingertips stretching a fraction of an inch at a

time—and at the first touch of precious metal, he tore back. He had it—had it in his numb, trembling hand—the necklace!

With mad haste he thrust it into his pocket, pushed the leaf down. Rapidly, but with almost tender care, he twisted the bolts tight. He lowered the wooden cover, replaced it, swung the shovel. Quickly he refilled the grave to its former level—and as he was climbing out, he heard footfalls along the path.

Marmon heaved up breathless, clutching the automatic. The footfalls stopped abruptly. A gruff voice called: "Who's that?" A blinding beam of light shot through the trees. It shafted upon Marmon as he whirled into a stumbling run. With the flash beam wavering behind him, he plunged among the trees while a man gave hard chase.

A hand gripped Marmon's arm. Lieutenant Carmody studied Marmon's haggard face, his sharp eyes glittering.

"What have you been doing, Marmon?"

Marmon snapped: "Let go of me!"

Carmody answered: "I stopped in the house to pick you up. The chief wants to talk to you. There are no witnesses to bear out your statement, you know—it doesn't sound straight to us. We want to find out if you had a reason—sane or insane—for killing Douglas Hartley."

"He was the brother of the girl I love."

"We're wondering," Carmody said, "whether that isn't what killed her—the shock of seeing her fiancé murder her brother."

**T**HE drive of Marmon's fist into Carmody's face was an explosive protest he could not control. The detective blurred back in the darkness. The light dropped from Carmody's hand as Marmon savagely struck again. Marmon fell on him, snatched the gun Carmody was



fumbling to get, hurled it far among the trees. Then, madly, he ran into the maze of shadows.

Marmon drove with mad shrewdness and speed. He kept to the back roads. With the radio playing, he waited for some hint of an alarm that the police had ordered a hunt for him, but none came. He pulled to a stop, at last, in front of an apartment building.

He left the elevator at the seventh floor, went to a door, knocked insistently. This was the apartment of a man whom Marmon knew—the jeweler from whom he had purchased Bernice's engagement ring, who had years earlier, fashioned the Hartley necklace. A sleepy voice asked through the panels:

"Who is it?"

"Grant Marmon. Open the door."

He stepped past a white-headed man whose beard was ruffled by sleep. Marmon, looking around, said "Wait!" He strode into the bathroom, held the necklace in a stream of water, until it was quite clean.

"Look at that," he directed.

The old man took it into blue-veined fingers. He shook his hoary head, ambled to a desk, fixed a lens in his eye.

"Paste," he said.

Marmon thrust the necklace into his pocket, strode out. He went to his car warily. He turned into the highway leading to the Hartley estate.

The sedative still numbed his mind, but he forced himself to think. When he reached a side road near the Hartley home, he left the roadster lightless, climbed a stone wall, crossed a field toward lighted windows. He entered the garden stealthily, looked into the library.

Carmody was there, one cheek marked by a cut, talking earnestly to Stanley Brainard. Marmon strained to catch each word.

"He can't be far away. He couldn't

have taken the girl a very long distance and he wouldn't leave her. I'm going to let him think he's getting away with it while I build up a case. In any event, removing a dead body is a serious offense."

*Dead body!* The mocking words turned Marmon's thoughts again to the girl lying alone and still.

"Suppose he hated Douglas Hartley without letting on—hated Hartley enough to kill, for some reason we haven't found out yet—but he loved the girl. Marmon didn't intend her to see him commit the murder, but she did. The shock of it killed her. That's why he can't admit even to himself he's responsible for the death of the girl he loved."

Stanley Brainard insisted: "It's not rational—the way he insists my step-daughter is still alive. Perhaps a desperate need for money—a crazy attempt to transfer the whole Hartley fortune to Bernice, so he could marry into it. He denies she's dead because if he admits the fact, he knows his murder was in vain—he's lost it all."

Carmody answered: "I'm playing it slow and careful. That's the way to handle an insane person—let him hang himself. Well—good night."

Marmon sidled out of the glow of the entrance lantern as the door opened. Carmody trudged out. A car ground down the drive. Marmon drifted around the house, opened the way quietly, went along the hall with slow tread. He was in the living-room before Brainard was aware of it.

**B**RAINARD started, grew white as a sheet. "Grant! The police are looking for you. You've gone too far—you've betrayed yourself."

Marmon asked tightly: "How much did you get for the necklace, Brainard?"

Brainard mumbled: "What?"

Marmon heard Caroline Brainard come into the room behind him. His eyes leveled at Brainard's cold and intense, as he stood with fists clenched. He went on tightly:

"The necklace—Letitia Hartley's—cost two hundred thousand. The paste duplicate was much less, wasn't it?—and she never knew the difference. We all thought it was real when it was buried with her—except you. I have it here—would you like to see it?"

"Good God, Grant!" Brainard exclaimed. "You're accusing me—"

The necklace glimmered in Marmon's palm. "Sold to one fence, then to another, then to a jeweler, and finally to a woman named Livermore—a deadly circle, Brainard, and it trapped you. You understood why Bernice and Doug were so disturbed lately. You remembered the questions they'd asked you about the necklace. You wanted to remove the casket from the grave. You were afraid of going to prison, Brainard—so afraid you committed murder to escape it."

"You *are* mad!"

Marmon took a slow step forward. "Madmen are dangerous, Brainard. They stop at nothing—yes, I'm like that now. I'm going to beat the truth out of you."

"Grant!" Caroline Brainard protested with breathless anxiety. "If you strike him, I'll call the police."

He looked around. The woman had already lifted the telephone receiver. Her face was ashen, her eyes terrorized. Marmon knew she would keep her promise. It was not fear of arrest that brought him to a pause, but thought of Bernice. Once jailed, he would be powerless to stop them.

"You're right, Caroline," Marmon said quietly. "After all, it's not necessary. Bernice saw the man who murdered Doug. She has only to speak his name when she awakens."

He strode out the entrance. As he trudged across the garden he felt a dewy chill along his spine. A cold instinctive warning that he was being watched persisted even when he suddenly left the path, leaped the wall, and cut across the field to the car.

He sped toward the lake, winding through the back roads, at once haunted by the sensation that he was being followed and driven by a consuming anxiety to reach Bernice, but when he swung near the water he felt sure he had shaken the unseen trailer.

She was lying in the darkness, still as he had left her, silent as the night that shrouded her. He knelt at her side. He fought down a mounting grief, a despair that threatened to overwhelm him, as her name rose yearningly to his lips.

"Bernice. . . . Bernice. . . ."

A sound? For a long moment he dared not raise his head. Had he heard a whispered word? Had those cold lips spoken? Perhaps it was only his fevered imagination tricking him, the madness of his mind mocking him, that wraith of sound still hovering in the air.

"Water. . . ."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Black House of Death

FADING embers lay on the hearth. Yellow lights filled the living-room of the Hartley house with a soft glow. Quiet, even footfalls disturbed the stillness of the early morning hours—Stanley Brainard walking back and forth, in front of the fireplace. His sister sat watching him, her eyes compassionate, her lips working with unspoken words until at last she said:

"You wouldn't keep the truth from me, Stanley."

Brainard paused. Tires were gritting

in the driveway. He opened the entrance as the car stopped. Dr. Fawcett shivered with the chill of the coming dawn.

"You're mad," he said. "The house is full of irrational people. Calling me out of bed at this hour of the night."

"I've got to be sure," Brainard pleaded. "I want to know definitely, once and for all, whether Bernice Hartley is really dead. If it's possible Marmon's right, if it's possible she's still alive—"

Fawcett grunted. "Do you want details? I made the auscultation test. I held a mirror at the girl's nostrils, and no dew gathered. I placed a downy feather on her upper lip, and it did not stir. I placed a saucer of water on her chest, and there wasn't a ripple. Those are respiratory proofs, Mr. Brainard."

"Yes?"

The physician's scowl deepened. "The conjunctiva of her eye had become insensitive. There was a loss of body heat. The cadaver exhibited primary flaccidity giving way to *rigor mortis*. The post-mortem lividities were in evidence. Putrefactive changes are sure to follow."

"Is there any reason, doctor—" Brainard asked it carefully—"any reason why you would wish to believe Bernice dead though she were really in a state of cataleptic trance?"

Again the physician officiously cleared his throat. "I am a man of science," he answered. "I am stating facts. I did not come here, Mr. Brainard, to be insulted."

A quiet step turned them. Their eyes widened at the young man who appeared on the sill. His cheeks were darkened with a beard, his eyes haggard with exhaustion. His shoulders were sagging and he was trembling as if with the chill of the dawn. It was Marmon.

"I've brought her back," he said.

Caroline Brainard rose tensely from her chair. She came slowly to Marmon, then

tried to pass him. He stopped her with an out-stretched arm.

"Where is she, Grant?"

"Upstairs. In her room. Please don't go up now."

The woman faltered: "We didn't hear you come in."

"The side door," he explained. "I didn't want anyone to see. Stay here, won't you—all of you?"

Brainard and Fawcett watched him silently as he went to the telephone. He opened the telephone book, thumbed down a column. They saw him guide his finger with difficulty as he spun the dial.

"Is that the Simon Calder Mortuary?" He squared his shoulders. "Is that Mr. Simon Calder speaking?" He took a slow, laborious breath. "This is Grant Marmon. I am at the Hartley house, Mr. Calder. You had best—come at once."

Brainard was studying Marmon's face while his own was eaten deep with black lines. Dr. Fawcett went to Marmon with an elaborately gentle gesture.

"Let me give you something to ease your nerves, my boy. You've got to rest or—"

"I'm all right." Marmon brought himself erect. "There's nothing to do but wait for Simon Calder."

Marmon eyed them intently. They lowered themselves uneasily into chairs, listening for the first sound of a car in the drive. The dimming coals in the fireplace made faint crinkling noises. The mantel clock ticked softly. Surprisingly soon the hum of an engine approached the house.

It was Lieut. Carmody. He came in warily as Marmon stood back. "I had a report you were here," he said quietly. "Now then, come along."

"In just a little while, lieutenant. We are waiting. Simon Calder is due here."

**T**HE light in Marmon's eyes was so strange the detective made no move

to stop him. He walked back to the living-room. Carmody entered it, rubbing his numb hands, still eying Marmon alertly. Brainard said quietly:

"He's brought her back."

"We're waiting," Marmon repeated, "for Simon Calder. Lieutenant, are you going to press charges against me? For assaulting an officer, I mean?"

"I can overlook that," Carmody answered wryly. "I want a confession."

Marmon made a groping gesture. "It's a little difficult, lieutenant. I'm not quite sure of everything that happened. It seems like a nightmare, most of it. It will be hard to separate the real from the unreal."

Carmody nodded. "Take your time, Marmon."

Now the sound of another car was penetrating the hush of the dawn. Marmon turned quietly to the entrance. Holding the door wide, he watched the hearse approach. Bright, shining black, it backed to the house. Dotey climbed down from the wheel and opened the rear doors. Simon Calder came toward Marmon carrying his black case.

The undertaker's narrowed eyes gleamed hostility as Marmon followed him along the hall. He paused to ask, "Where is she?" Marmon gestured and answered: "Go into the living-room first, Mr. Calder." The undertaker lowered his case, went through the door uncertainly. Marmon faced them all.

"I have already asked Lieutenant Carmody a question I must ask you, too, Mr. Calder," he said. "Are you going to charge me with felonious assault?"

Calder answered: "I would be fully justified. I consider it an outrage. I'll promise you nothing."

The bitter twist returned to Marmon's lips. To Carmody he said: "You are seeking a murderer, lieutenant, and you believe I am guilty. I have also been hunting him, and I suspected Stanley Brain-

ard. Only one person ever knew the truth, other than the murderer himself—Bernice Hartley. You wish a confession, lieutenant, and perhaps you'll have it. We may be sure of one fact. The murderer is here in this room, now."

Marmon's gaze turned to Stanley Brainard during a moment's tight hush. "I'll give you all the facts, Lieutenant Carmody—clean-cut and conclusive, all of them. Or perhaps Mr. Calder will give them to you instead."

The undertaker snapped: "What the devil are you talking about?"

"The necklace," Marmon answered quietly. "A week passed between Letitia Brainard's death and her burial—all the time needed for the making of the duplicate. You used the newspaper photograph as a pattern. You handled the exchange very deftly, because none of us suspected the necklace placed in the casket was paste."

The twinkling string dangled from Marmon's extended hand.

"And you knew Bernice and Douglas Hartley had discovered it. You were warned by the questions they asked you. You watched them for fear the truth would be revealed. That's why you hid night after night in the cemetery, near the grave containing a corpse you'd robbed. It meant ruin and prison for you, Calder—that's why you stopped Douglas Hartley with a bullet."

Calder was standing rigid, his eyes stony. "Let him finish. He's mad. You can see it in his eyes. He's accusing me to shield himself."

Marmon pressed on grimly. "How often have you done that, Calder—robbed the bodies entrusted to you? Many persons want to take their treasures to the grave with them. The cemeteries of the world hide untold fortunes in jewels buried with their owners. You've stolen from the dead again and again, haven't you,



Calder? You were afraid it would all come out with the opening of Letitia Brainard's casket."

Calder repeated contemptuously: "He's mad."

Marmon's fist clenched on the false stones. "You tried to kill Bernice too because she saw you fire the shot! Your bullet missed, and you had to rush from the cemetery because I was coming—but you were playing in luck, weren't you, Calder? You came back to knife a girl who a doctor swore was dead, because you didn't dare wait. A wound only you would have seen, and you would have said nothing! You filthy devil—"

The undertaker sneered. "You haven't the slightest proof of what you say. You admit yourself the girl is the only eyewitness and she's—"

He broke off in a gasp. His widened eyes gazed past Marmon, through the door. Dr. Fawcett stood transfixed. Lieutenant Carmody muttered a broken prayer. Stanley Brainard recoiled. His sister swayed as if about to faint. A rustle sounded as a girl paused in the doorway.

Her face had lost the pallor of death. Her lips were ripe red again, her cheeks rich with color. Her eyes were bright, her manner composed. She was fully, smartly clothed, glowing with refreshed vitality. She smiled as she came to Marmon's side.

"Bernice," he asked quietly, "whom did you see kill your brother?"

"Simon Calder."

**T**HE undertaker broke away from his position so violently, so suddenly, a chair toppled to its side. He twisted toward the door, dragging a revolver from his hip pocket. Consternation held Carmody motionless until the weapon was leveled. Calder waved it, covering every person facing him, backing to the door.

"What are you going to do, Calder?" he asked quietly. "Do you think you can

get away now? It's too late—much too late."

Calder was turning the black muzzle at Bernice. His wizened body was trembling, drawing taut. An insane fury smouldered in his eyes as he began to squeeze the trigger. The hammer of the revolver rose . . . rose . . .

The gun cracked at the instant Marmon leaped. Calder lurched, arms upthrown. The bullet furrowed into the ceiling and flakes of plaster rained. Bernice Hartley clung breathless to Marmon's arm. Calder, whirled into the hall, was pointing the revolver again. Marmon stood in front of the girl, protecting her, as Carmody turned to the French windows.

The detective slipped out into the grey light as Calder sped to the entrance. The undertaker drew up with a gasp, glimpsing Carmody at the side of the hearse. Carmody's one hand was on the steering wheel, defying Calder to touch it; his other was leveling his police positive. Calder pointed his revolver full at the detective's chest, flattening against the black side of the hearse.

"Don't stop me," he warned.

Backing, Calder suddenly spun—to face Marmon. Marmon was coming out the entrance. He took slow steps toward Calder, smiling tensely, his advance challenging the gun. Calder retreated before the inexorable sureness of Marmon's deliberate march. The undertaker whirled, eyes flashing with terror, and sprang to the step of the hearse. He lunged in, pulling the black doors shut.

A muffled shot boomed inside the carrier of the dead.

Marmon turned away. Bernice was in his arms. He held her close, hungry for the warm softness of lips that once had been cold, looking into clear, bright eyes that once had been closed as if forever. Her vitality brought ease to his soul.

"You see," he said, "she was only sleeping."

THE END