



Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Master of Souls

By HAROLD WARD



"His body seemed to disappear. Only his head was left floating on air."

A gripping tale of a Satanist, to whom murder was a commonplace and who wallowed in human misery

1. The Horror

IT WAS my first day at Doctor Peter Dryson's so-called private sanitarium. I had been out of work for a long time and was glad to get the place, even though there was something eerie and sinister about the tumbledown old mansion set back in the woods. Dryson had little money; he admitted the fact to me. A specialist, a dreamer, the treatment of the insane offered him an opportunity to

try out his pet theories anent the ungeared mind.

I had been to the village for supplies. Darkness had overtaken me. Parking the car in the weather-beaten garage, I hastened around to the front door. My key was in the lock before I noted the absence of light. Yet the little I had seen of my employer led me to believe him capable of almost any sort of eccentricity. Perhaps, I thought, he liked to sit in the darkness and brood. He was a peculiar

chap at best, living alone with a bunch of maniacs, his only help, until my arrival, a half-wit named Ned who worked for his board and room.

Slamming the door behind me, I shuffled down the dark hall, my arm outstretched to avoid bumping into something in the darkness. My groping fingers touched something cold—cold and clammy and hairy. It swung away from me like the pendulum of a clock—swung back and struck me, almost knocking me off my feet.

I leaped back, the packages I carried beneath my left arm dropping to the floor. Fighting off the impulse to turn and run, I explored my pockets for a match. Finding one, I scratched it on the wall. Its feeble glow dissipated the darkness for an instant.

The body of Doctor Dryson hung in the doorway. A rope had been thrown over the top of the transom and knotted about his skinny, hair-covered neck. His toes just touched the floor. His eyes were open and staring. His bearded lower jaw was drooping. His thin face was purple and black.

The match burned itself out as I stood there petrified with fear. Turning, I dashed madly down the hallway to the door. I fumbled with my key. In my excitement I dropped it. My foot struck it and I heard it slide across the polished floor. I searched my pockets for a second match, but failed to find one. I straightened up, my face covered with cold sweat, cursing the rules of the institution that had caused me to lock the door as I entered.

At the end of the hall in Dryson's office was a box of matches. I recalled seeing it on top of the desk. In order to find my key I must go back past the horror that hung in the doorway and grope about the darkened office until I found the matches.

For there was no electricity, no gas—nothing but ancient kerosene lamps.

How I mustered up courage enough to negotiate the short distance I do not know. My hair stood up like the quills of a porcupine as I brushed against Dryson's body. An instant later the matches were in my hand. Scratching one, I lighted the big desk-lamp, my fingers trembling so that I could hardly apply the flame to the wick.

I heard a movement behind me, and whirled about. In a distant corner stood Ned, the half-wit, his big, pasty face twisted into a silly grin. In his hand was a huge butcher-knife. Pointing to the dead thing in the doorway, he gabbled excitedly.

"The key! The key!" he exclaimed, slitting the rope with a sweeping stroke of the knife and letting the body drop to the floor.

"I haven't got it," I managed to ejaculate.

He advanced a step toward me.

"Key!" he commanded again. "Ned wants key."

"I dropped it when I entered," I stutted. "It is on the floor in the hallway."

With a grunt, he stepped over the sprawled body on the floor and entered the hall. A moment later he returned, the key in his hand. Seating himself on the floor beside his dead master, he thrust the key into the latter's pocket and grinned at me again.

"Doctor sleep," he whispered. "Ned watch while doctor sleep."

HE BRANDISHED the knife as I took a step toward him. There was no getting past him. Dropping into the doctor's chair behind the desk, I selected one of the physician's cigarettes from a carton at my elbow and lighted it. The nicotine soothed me.

Then, for the first time, I noted the letter. It was written in pencil. The signature was that of Dryson:

"I am going mad," it read. "Soon I shall be as bad as the poor devils who are under my care. I am having hallucinations. They are the first symptoms. It has been coming on for several days. The cadavers! I see them moving about in their coffins. God! One of them moved just now. I can stand no more. I will put an end to everything before it is too late—before they lock me up as I have locked these other poor wretches in my custody. "Dryson."

Involuntarily I turned my head. Across the room, resting on trestles, were two cheap, black coffins. Dryson had secured them with their grisly contents only a few days before from a near-by poor farm. Poor wretches! Their bodies had been sold to him to help the county pay, in part, the cost of their keep. He had intended using them for experimental purposes.

The face of the man—there were two of them, a man and a woman—was twisted into a smile! Then one of his eyes opened. I saw the glazed eyeball gazing through the glass of the casket top.

The coffin lid was suddenly lifted and the dead body sat upright! Then the lid struck the floor with a splintering crash. The coffin fell from its trestle with a jar that rocked the house. The dead body rolled toward me, bent almost double. It started to arise.

Ned leaped to his feet with a shrill scream.

Then the guttering, flickering lamp went out.

"Ned!" I shouted. "Ned, where are you?"

From the other side of the room came an answering whimper. There was another crash as the glass of the second

coffin was broken. For an instant I imagined that Ned had blundered into it and toppled it over. But no. I heard him in a distant corner whimpering and whining. Something floated through the air and twisted itself about my legs. It smelled old and musty. I knew it for a woman's shroud. It tripped me and I went down on all fours. My fingers touched the dead face of Doctor Dryson. I leaped up with a startled cry. One of the maniacs in the back room heard my shriek and gave an answering howl. The others joined in the refrain.

And in the room was something even more horrible than the lunatical gabbling . . . silence. Deep, somber, oppressive silence.

Something bumped against me. There was a howl of mortal terror. A knife buried itself in my arm. I jerked myself loose from the cruel fingers that seemed searching for my throat and flung myself forward, gripping at the imbecile's legs. We went down in a rolling, tumbling heap upon the body of the suicide. I heard the knife tinkle against the floor.

"Ned!" I shouted. "Ned, stop!"

There was no answer. The huge fingers sought my throat again. Somehow I managed to avoid them and leaped to my feet, gasping for breath. I heard the half-wit do the same. For a moment I waited, my body tense, for him to attack again. My foot was braced against the body of Dryson.

The thing suddenly moved. It drew away from my foot. It rose. It stretched itself and yawned.

"Lenore!" a hollow voice called. "Lenore, my soulmate!"

As from a great distance came the voice of a woman.

"I come, beloved! I come!"

Ned screamed wildly. He was berserk

as he threw himself in the direction of the voice. I heard him leap, and tried to dodge. His huge body struck mine. His fingers grasped my coat—tore it from me—grasped it again. Then they closed over my windpipe. I struggled for breath. The blood surged through my head.

How long we fought I do not know. Slowly, gradually the cruel grip tightened. Stabbing pains jabbed me in the lungs. The very life was being squeezed out of me by the fear-crazed man. I ceased hammering at his face and seized his wrists in an effort to tear them from my neck, but in vain. I felt my strength leaving me. Consciousness was slipping . . . slipping . . . slipping. . . .

Suddenly the room was filled with a great light. I felt the air rush into my lungs as the vise-like grip upon my throat was loosened. I sucked it in in great mouthfuls. Over me the flat, pasty face of the idiot danced in ever-widening circles. He half rose, a wild, frightened look creeping over his countenance.

"Ned! Stop! Stop, I say!"

My antagonist rose slowly to his knees, his massive head turned toward the speaker. My own gaze followed his.

Dryson was leaning against the desk. The lamp had been relighted; the half-burned match was still between his fingers. The rope with which he had hanged himself was still knotted about his neck; the end of it hung down over his shoulder like a grotesque necktie pulled out of place. His body was bent forward. His face was still purple and blotched and swollen, yet his eyes glittered like live coals as he snapped his finger at the brainless thing that had almost killed me. The half-wit shuffled to his feet, his head hanging like that of a child caught in some deviltry.

Then consciousness left me.

W. T.—3

2. *The Master of Souls*

I MUST have been unconscious but a short time; for when I opened my eyes again I was still lying on the floor in the center of the room. Doctor Dryson was seated at his desk. On the opposite side stood Ned, bruised and battered. The frayed end of the rope still hung from the transom. The physician had removed the noose from around his neck and had thrown it carelessly upon the pile of magazines and papers before him.

I pulled my reluctant frame into a sitting posture. The movement caused Dryson to turn his eyes in my direction for an instant. Then he returned to the tongue-lashing he was giving the idiot. I noted the mass of debris upon the floor—the smashed coffins, the broken glass, the overturned trestles. A faded bouquet of flowers lay beside one of them, the last gift of some poor friend.

And both caskets were empty! Of that much I was certain. The tops of both were turned toward me.

Was I, too, going insane? It was an impossibility for the dead to walk. And yet—yet I had seen that dead man sit up in his coffin—had seen him leap toward me just as the light went out! And even now the odor of death still permeated the room. I had seen and yet I doubted.

My startled glance strayed across the room. One of the bodies, that of the man, lay on the floor where I had last seen the body of Doctor Dryson. In life he had been old, bent as a result of hard work, his skin parched and leathery and wrinkled, drawn down over his cheek-bones—a man with great, hooked nose and sunk-en eyes. He was clad in a cheap suit such as the county gives to its charges.

Dryson! Was it possible for a man from whose body the vital spark had been squeezed as a lemon is crushed in a squeezer—was it possible for such a man

to return to the land of the living? Yet Doctor Dryson had achieved the seemingly impossible. He sat before me, a living, animated thing of flesh and blood, apparently none the worse for his horrible experience, for even now the blotched, swollen appearance was going out of his face.

He dismissed the idiot with a gesture. Then as Ned slunk from the room, he turned to me.

"Feeling better, Mister——"

He hesitated.

"I seem to have forgotten your name," he added apologetically.

"Van Gilder," I answered thickly through my bruised lips. "Hubert Van Gilder."

He nodded. Rising, he assisted me to my feet and seated me in an easy-chair on the opposite side of the desk from where he had been sitting. Stepping to a glass cabinet, he cast his eyes over the array of bottles until he found that for which he sought. Mixing a small draft in a glass, he pressed it to my lips and bade me drink. Sick and sore though I was, I shuddered as his flesh came in contact with mine. He noticed this and smiled enigmatically.

"There are many things of which you do not know the meaning," he remarked.

The concoction raced through my veins like molten metal. For an instant I felt as light as a feather. I wanted to rise, to soar to the ceiling. Then my chin dropped to my chest and the longing to sleep surged over me.

"Help me get him upstairs," I heard the physician mutter to some one. "The poor devil is in a fearful condition. Yet his body is worth saving and we must get him back to normal before we can go ahead with our plans."

A woman's voice answered him. It was in the same throaty contralto I had heard when I was battling with Ned in

the darkness—the same voice that had answered the mysterious call. I felt myself being lifted. The doctor was on one side of me. The hand of some one else seemed to be beneath my arm. Again the horrible odor of death assailed my nostrils. I turned.

A dried, parchment-like face peered at me with beady little eyes.

It was the face of the dead woman I had seen in the casket. She lifted her shroud with her left hand as she aided the doctor in getting me up the stairs.

WHEN I awoke I was lying in a soft bed. Close by, some one was speaking in a low tone. I was stiff and sore. Every muscle ached from the beating I had received. My lips were puffed and swollen, and my bones seemed to tear and rend my flesh with every movement.

I stirred. The sound of voices ceased.

"Awake, eh?" I heard the voice of Doctor Dryson inquire.

I turned my head with an effort. Then I raised myself to my elbow, my eyes bulging with astonishment.

The dead woman was gliding through the door. Then I had not been dreaming after all!

The doctor reached across the coverlid and pressed his long fingers to my pulse. He halted my exclamation with a gesture.

"No talking, please," he commanded.

Taking a glass of medicine from the bedside table, he poured out a spoonful and pressed it to my lips. Then, pushing me gently back against the pillows, he sat down by the side of the bed and lighted a cigarette.

"Life is a peculiar thing, Van Gilder," he said, as if taking up a conversation where he had left off. "We are the same today, tomorrow and yesterday. In the beginning the Creator of all things put a certain number of egos, of living entities,

upon this world. The same number are here now—will be here a million years from now—no more and no less. Matter is mortal mind, life is infinite mind. From dust we came and to dust we return, but life, the soul, goes on for ever."

He hesitated for an instant as if groping for words with which to explain himself.

"You have just witnessed what, to you, is probably a startling thing. You have watched a dead person—a woman embalmed and in her coffin for several days—walk out of this room. But I tell you that there is no such thing as death. The body wears out, yes; but the soul goes on and on and on until the end of time. And, naturally, it must inhabit many bodies before it is finally called back to its Creator."

His manner was that of a teacher attempting to explain a hard problem to an infant. Then he continued:

"Doctor Dryson is dead. You saw his body hanging from the transom downstairs. You saw Ned, the nit-wit, cut it down. Yet I tell you that Doctor Dryson is not dead, even though it may appear so to you. But his soul can never return to inhabit his body because he tore the two apart. The Creator is not ready for it, nor can it find a resting-place here. Instead it must go on and on and on through space until the end of all things comes.

"Nor am I Doctor Dryson, even though I inhabit his body temporarily. I am Harlow—Harlow, Master of Souls. I could rule the world if I cared to. But of what avail is temporal power? Kings die, thrones crumble. But I—I go on for ever. For I am Harlow.

"But why look startled, my friend? I have been scanning the questionnaire you filled out when you accepted a place here with Dryson. I note that you are an educated man, a graduate of a great univer-

sity. What matter if you are temporarily out of work—or were until you got this place? Education means development of the soul. And as an educated man you must know that there are more things unknown to the world than the world will ever know. So heed well what I am about to say."

HE LEANED back in his chair and laughed harshly.

"Have you ever heard of the science of metempsychosis? No? Metempsychosis, my friend, is one of the forbidden mysteries—Black Art, in plain words. It has to do with the transmigration of the soul into the bodies of other men or lower animals. Few men have ever understood it. It was practised thousands of years ago, but gradually died out; until today I am the only man in the world who understands it. And why? Because I have lived so long that I have almost forgotten my early life. Of all those who dabbled with the Black Arts centuries ago, I alone survive.

"I prompted Dryson to write that letter which he left on the desk," he chuckled. "I prompted him to kill himself. But why? Because I needed his body—this shell that I am wearing. For many long days my soul—my intellect, my spirit—has been without a decent abiding-place. Because of a slip of judgment—for wise as I am with the wisdom of the centuries behind me, I sometimes grow careless—because of a slip of judgment, I say, the body in which I was dwelling was destroyed—burned. So, too, was the temporal dwelling-place of Lenore, my soulmate. We were wandering through space, she and I, forgetful of time—for time has no meaning to us—and upon our return we found that the bodies in which we had been temporarily dwelling had been destroyed by a fire.

"A peculiar feature of the science of metempsychosis is that, while a soul may enter the dead body of any one, in order to function properly it must enter the body just as the other soul is leaving. We were weary. For a brief time we entered the shells of the two corpses lying in the room downstairs.

"Then the thought came to me to try an experiment. Even though I was not supposed to be able to manipulate the soul from within a dead body such as that I occupied, I willed that Dryson should leave his shell. You know how I turned the trick. His soul passed out of its dwelling-place. Ordinarily I could have separated it from its body in the twinkling of an eye and without going to so much trouble, but I was weary and, as I have said, one must really feel the red blood coursing through his veins in order to be at his best. Then, just as the vital spark was leaving his body, I entered it and revived it—and not a minute too soon to save your soul from passing on."

He lighted another cigarette and, leaning back in the chair, surveyed me from under half-lowered lids.

"Was the man a charlatan? Was he a maniac? For an instant I was inclined to believe him one of the two. Then the strange and horrible things that I had witnessed flashed through my mind and I shuddered involuntarily. No. In spite of the fact that things such as he spoke of could *not* happen, I had yet been a witness to their actuality.

But he was speaking again.

"Lenore, my soulmate, is without a proper body," he went on. "Her soul still rests in the withered shell of the old woman from the poorhouse. Not that she particularly cares, since she has, in her time, played many parts. But for the purpose of securing for her a shell in keeping with her wonderful intellect I

must, my friend, borrow that which you now inhabit. Not, however, until you have finally recovered. I should hate to see the soul of Lenore in such a battered case.

"It will be for but a short time. Then, if you are the sensible man I take you to be, you will join us. Lenore is a wonderful woman—a woman such as few men have ever met. And, too, I note from the papers you left with Dryson that you have interested yourself in things outside the pale—that you have dabbled in spiritualism and the various 'ologies'. Have you ever read anything along the line of ancient magic—demonology, witchcraft and the like?"

I shook my head weakly. Harlow leaned forward again, his eyes blazing like twin coals.

"You have not even scratched the surface, then, college graduate though you are," he said with a sage shake of his head. "I can offer you an insight into all of them. And what is more, I can make death a joke to you—I can offer you unending life. With two people such as Lenore and yourself to help me—and I have long wanted an assistant to aid me—there will be no limits to what we can do."

He arose suddenly and gazed down on me.

"The chance is yours," he said. "Refuse and I take your body anyway. Accept and I offer you—everything. What do you say?"

I was hypnotized. I must have murmured assent, for his face brightened.

"It is well," he said, half to himself. "However, your wounds are such that you will not be able to get about for a few days. But I will take no chances."

His body seemed to disappear. Only his head was left, it seemed, floating on air. Then it, too, vanished and only the

eyes remained. They seemed to bore into the very core of my brain. I felt the lower part of my body stiffen. My legs became lifeless.

Then the eyes dissolved into space. My head was as clear as a crystal. I sat up in bed. Harlow had gone.

I tried to move. I was bound to the bed by invisible cords. The man's will had predominated. I was helpless.

3. *The Master Commands*

THE remainder of what I am about to write will sound like the ravings of a disordered brain. In fact, so weird, so unbelievable is it all that I can scarcely believe it myself. Yet I had been through enough to prepare me for anything. Harlow, to give the man his due, had given me fair warning.

Sometimes I wonder if I have not just awakened from a horrible nightmare—a vision so real, so vivid, that it has seared itself indelibly upon my brain. Again the thought comes to me that I am insane. But no. It is neither a dream nor the fantastic imaginings of an obsessed mind. My experiences have been real ones. I have actually lived that which I am setting down on paper. I have only to gaze at myself in the mirror to realize that. I entered the old stone house where Doctor Dryson had his private sanitarium, a young, stalwart, athletic man of eight-and-twenty with wavy brown hair and the clear complexion that comes from a life in the open. Today, although only a few short weeks have passed according to the calendar, my hair is as white as the first snow of winter, while my skin is drawn and parchment-like with deep lines engraved upon my forehead. No, I am not dreaming. Would to God that I was—that I could throw aside this horror and wake up without those haunting recollections!

How long I lay in that sunny, upstairs room of Doctor Dryson's I do not know. I was in a daze. Nights followed days and days followed nights until I lost all recollection of time. Occasionally I heard the wild shrieking of the maniacs. Sometimes I felt the presence of a tall, emaciated form by the side of my bed and the pressure of a spoon to my lips. But most of the time I slept. I know now that I was hypnotized—that under the powerful will of this strange man who called himself Harlow my brain had ceased functioning.

But meanwhile my body was righting itself. For even though my mind was temporarily dead, nature was working steadily. The twisted bones and torn muscles straightened themselves again. The blood left the bruised and battered spots upon my flesh until, when Harlow finally bade me awake, I was a healthy human being again with the rich, red corpuscles racing through my veins. Only my legs were still paralyzed. And I was still in a daze.

IT WAS nighttime when the transformation came, when my legs righted themselves and I regained possession of my faculties. The maniacs had ceased their gibbering, and silence, deep and brooding, had settled over the rambling old house. I felt myself being lifted and carried down the stairway to the room just off the office where the laboratory was located. I attempted to help myself, but a feeling of inertia swept over me and I allowed myself to be dragged along like an ox to the slaughter. Yet something—some sixth sense—warned me, told me that all was not right—told me that I should fight with every ounce of strength that was in me against the unknown horror that was to come.

Yet I did not fight. I felt myself being

laid down. Straps were fastened about my arms and legs and about my middle. As from a great distance two lights appeared. They were like the lamps of an automobile traveling toward me at terrific speed. Closer and closer they came until they resolved into eyes—great, glaring eyes—eyes that seemed to burn into my very brain and twist the gray matter until it sizzled and writhed like a nest of maggots in a bit of cheese.

Then, just as a room is transformed from darkness to light, I found myself in full possession of my faculties. I was strapped upon an operating-table. Over me bent Harlow, his bearded chin almost touching my face. He smiled as he gazed down at me. Then he turned to some one else just outside my range of vision.

"He is well and in splendid condition," he said. "What a man he is! He has the body of an athlete—the sort of body that comes from clean living and clean thinking. Lenore, into such a shell I shall have no fear of transferring your soul until I can find a proper resting-place for it."

I heard a murmur of approval close beside me. I managed to shift my head to one side. The aged dead woman was standing a short distance away. She was still clad in the habiliments of the grave.

Harlow turned to me. His voice lost its harshness and assumed a sort of purring sound. For some reason it reminded me of the purr of a cat that has had its evening milk and is drowsing lazily by the fireside.

"I am about to make an experiment," he said. "It lies with you whether you will assist me voluntarily, whether you will share with me the glory and the profit as a partner and assistant as you agreed or whether you must be forced into it against your will. For several days, ever since I tore you from the grasp of the half-wit, I have been preparing you

for the ordeal. I offer you everything—money and all that it will buy—sensual pleasure, fair women—the fairest of them all, Lenore, my soulmate—the opportunity to see things and explore places that mortal eyes were never meant to gaze upon. All this I offer for the temporary use of that great body of yours. Refuse, and I take it anyway. Refuse, and I will tear your soul from your body, and when I am through with your carcass, I will turn it over to the foul beasts of the field and the carrion-eaters of the air. You can make things easy or hard for yourself. Which will it be? I have no time to temporize."

He stopped suddenly. My will was not my own. I know it now, but I did not know it then. A feeling swept over me that it would be folly to oppose this man. Why not allow myself to be swept along with the current? Why not take the easiest way?

If I had only known what was in store for me! Better it would have been had I allowed the beasts to tear me limb from limb as he had threatened. Better had I been burned piecemeal and my ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven. It would have only meant—but why philosophize? Why cry over spilled milk? I did not know. . . . Oh God! I did not know!

Feebly I nodded assent. His eyes lighted up. The man was almost handsome when he smiled.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Then listen, my friend—listen to me closely. I am about to take your soul from your body. You will feel no pain. Think—think hard that your soul is being separated from the shell in which it dwells. You——"

His final words were lost to me. I felt myself engulfed in blackness. I was falling . . . falling . . . falling through an

endless void. Down . . . down . . . down. . . .

THERE was a feeling of mustiness about me. I felt aged. I seemed to look out upon the centuries and yet I had no clear, distinct thought. Everything was nebulous and foggy. I was being whirled along a river—a wide, sluggish river filled with lotus and strange flowers. Along the banks alligators basked in the warm sunshine. A hippopotamus wallowed in the mud. Palm trees waved in the spice-laden breeze. I was shaking a jingling sistrum. I—

God in heaven! I was a woman! I was the dead woman! I gazed down upon myself. The shroud hung upon me like a bit of sacking. My nostrils were filled with the decay of the grave.

I gazed across the room. My body was still strapped in the chair. Above it hovered a transparent, gossamer-like vapor. I watched it settle upon me. It surrounded me, caressed me. Then it slowly evaporated as it saturated my flesh with itself.

Yes, I saw my body sit up as Harlow tore the straps from about my wrists. I saw myself stretch forth my hands and caress him. I stroked his hair, his face, his body as he bent over me and unbuckled the straps about my ankles. I saw him shrug his shoulders and coldly push me away. He laughed harshly.

"We win again, Lenore!" he chortled. "We win again! Come, gaze upon yourself in the mirror and see what a handsome boy you make—a radical change from the dried and wrinkled form of the hag yonder. Soon the body which you now inhabit will be yours to toy with, yours to play with, yours to torture with your beauty and your arts. You have always cared for love, Lenore. Too bad that I have not the time to gratify your

desires. But enough prattle. Run upstairs and dress. I want to gaze upon you again as a woman—the woman of my dreams—the woman I have loved through the ages. With my skill it will be easy to pick a shell for you—a girl of wondrous beauty. Then I will weave my spell about her so that she will be ready when I call."

I say that I heard and saw all this. Yet it was in an impersonal way. I was, well, I was like an actor who gazes upon himself as the film in which he has played unrolls itself before him on the silver screen. Yes, I saw myself dart through the door. I heard my footsteps echo through the hollow hall. Yet I was a woman—a dried and shriveled crone with bent back, toothless, gray-haired, tottering and scarcely able to walk. Yes, and clad in the grave-clothes furnished by the supervisor of the poor.

4. *Black Art*

WOULD to God that I might forget that which I am now about to write. It is all so horrible, so monstrous, so diabolical that it horrifies even me, inured though I am to Harlow's ghoulish atrocities. I say that it horrifies me. Do I mean that? It horrifies me to write of it now, but then I thought little of it. I wonder why? There is only one answer: I was under the spell of Harlow and his mate, Lenore. I was like a man in a daze. My will was his will. But I digress.

Scarcely had Lenore—I say Lenore, although it was I, for she was attired in my earthly form—scarcely had she entered the room and seated herself when Harlow pressed the button which summoned Ned. The half-wit shuffled into the big laboratory, the sleep still in his dull eyes. He had dressed hurriedly to obey the summons; he yawned and stretched himself

like a man still in a doze as he stood before the man he believed his master.

"Ned comes," he said. "Doctor send for Ned with button."

Harlow nodded. His long arms darted toward the other. From the ends of his fingers electric sparks appeared to leap. The half-wit straightened himself, grinned idiotically, then obediently climbed into the chair I had so recently quitted. An instant later he was asleep, his huge body paralyzed by the hypnotic powers of the master metaphysician.

Harlow worked fast. With Lenore's assistance he tore the clothing from the half-wit's body. There was no need to strap the idiot to the chair. He was too deeply under the influence of the master to move.

I sat there spellbound, fascinated, and watched them practise their hellish rites. I saw Lenore hand Harlow the long, sharp knife. I saw him plunge it into the idiot's abdomen and cut with a peculiar, twisting, sideways motion of the wrist. Ugh! It was horrible—too horrible for me to put on paper.

He stepped back, his body bent forward, his keen eyes gazing at the flow of blood and viscera, watching every twisting stream as it flowed across the floor.

The hypnotized man in the operating-chair made little movement. Such as he did make while the life slowly left his body was watched as closely as was the flow of blood. Once I heard Harlow give a startled exclamation; it changed to a cry of satisfaction as Lenore pointed to where a tiny stream of blood, striking against a protuberance in the floor, had twisted to the right. Then again and again came the same deep sigh of satisfaction as he pointed here and there to various changes in the gruesome mass.

Finally he straightened up and touched

his companion—touched my body—upon the shoulder.

"The signs favor us, loved one," he whispered. "I see your soul clothed in wondrous beauty. I see happiness for all three of us—a future as bright as the silver of yonder crone's hair. And see"—he pointed to one of the crimson streams—"see, even the way is pointed out for us. And the signs say that it must be tonight."

She nodded and turned away.

I leaped to my feet. Harlow seemed to notice me then for the first time, so absorbed had he been in his hellish incantations.

"Anthropomancy," he said in answer to my unspoken question, "the art of forecasting the future by the use of human entrails and viscera. It was once in great favor, but was stopped by the authorities and eventually became one of the black sciences. It never fails!"

He stopped, startled for an instant by my look of horror.

"Wipe that look off your face, my friend," he chuckled. "When you have delved in the black arts as long as I have you will cease to consider the life of one person as compared to the good of the whole. And Ned—what was he? A nitwit, doomed to go through life smirking and grinning. If there is a God as we say there is, is not Ned better off with Him than here on this earth, a brainless gob of flesh and blood? For the first time in his life he has been of use. Forget the horror of what you have seen and come on. Soon you will be back within your own body with Lenore—my Lenore—by your side. You have not yet begun to witness my power."

Again I obeyed his command. The automobile was waiting outside. I followed him to it. Lenore was waiting on the porch. He climbed beneath the wheel

and pressed the starter, secure in the knowledge of what he had learned through his hellish arts.

5. *The Stolen Body*

SOMEWHERE a dance was in progress. The soft, sensual music was wafted to us on the breeze as we rolled along the smooth, concrete highway. From out of the darkness came the sound of girlish laughter and the silvery tinkle of crystal goblets. I could vision the graceful movements of the dancers, the rhythmic sway of body clasped to body, the bright lights, the glitter of jewels against pink flesh, the gayety of it all.

The sudden turn of the car as Harlow twisted the wheel to the left threw me against the cushions. An instant later we were gliding along a narrow, country lane where the trees almost touched overhead, so heavy was the foliage. After going a short distance he pulled off to one side of the road and listened. For a moment we sat there as he whispered something to his companion. Then, opening the door, they got out and assisted my, withered form to the ground, throwing a blanket over my shoulders lest the whiteness of my grave-clothes show too vividly against the darkness of the night. Then they led the way through the brush and foliage to a lawn trimmed to velvet smoothness and across it to the house whence the music came.

It was a wonderful structure of brick and mortar, a veritable castle in size, surrounded by wide porches and great sun-parlors and conservatories. The side from which we approached was almost in darkness; there was a single dim light in the sun-parlor from which a big French window opened upon a little terrace separated from the house by a cluster of barberries and sumac bushes. The ballroom was on the opposite side of the wide hall. The

big door was open and through it we could see the dancers as they glided across the waxed floor. The wide driveway swung around to that side, also; we could glimpse the liveried chauffeurs standing around the cars parked along the edge of the brilliantly lighted lawn. Yet, as I have said, that part of the grounds where we found ourselves was deserted. So, too, was the brilliantly lighted sun-parlor into which we peered as we crouched in the midst of the clump of bushes.

None of us spoke. As for myself, I had no inclination to speak. I was dissociated from myself, as it were. Yet I was there, and at the same time I was not there, it seemed. I knew that I was the dead woman whom Harlow and his companion were looking after so carefully. Yet it was my body standing by Harlow's side. I can not describe my feelings. As well not try.

Harlow was bending forward, his forehead furrowed in concentration. Suddenly there was a stir from within the house. He laid his hand on his companion's arm. I say *companion*, for I can not say *my* arm. Yet it was upon my arm that he laid his hand.

"The divination works!" he exclaimed beneath his breath. "Look, soulmate of mine, at the shell my arts have produced for you."

A woman was entering the sun-parlor. Dim though the light was, the semi-darkness could not obliterate or hide her rare beauty. She was tall and slender—slightly taller than the average of womankind—with great, dark eyes and hair the color of a starless sky. She was graceful; every movement was lissom and pantherish. The thought flashed through my mind that here was a woman meant for loving and for love—a woman who would fight like a fiend out of Hades for the man she loved and go down to the very dregs of

purgatory for him, but who, once scorned, would rend and tear and bite and kill—the kind of woman with whom a man like Harlow would naturally mate.

I knew that Harlow, through his devilish incantations, had realized all the time that she would be there and that she would be the kind of woman that she was. I knew, too, that he had called to her through space. How did I know these things? I can not answer. It was natural for me to know them; more I can not say. I watched her throw herself upon a divan. She yawned behind her slender white hand. That she was bored—that she had stolen away from the other dancers for a moment's relaxation—was apparent. I saw Harlow's gaunt shoulders heave and his lean muscles contract as he gazed at her. Then his long arms were extended toward her. From the tips of his fingers leaped sparks. The girl on the divan half aroused, yawned, then dropped back with a little sigh. Her graceful form relaxed and she seemed to sleep.

Harlow was working rapidly now. The dim light from the sun-parlor reflected the great globules of sweat that stood out upon his pale brow. His eyes glittered like live coals. The girl on the divan seemed to disintegrate. . . . She pulled herself together, as it were. . . . Then, rising, she walked slowly through the open French window toward us.

An aura surrounded her. It was thin, fog-like, vaporish. From the body of the man beside Harlow—from *my* body—emanated the same white fog. We were surrounded by it. The two vapors met—blended into one—separated again. Then my body—the body of Hubert Van Gilder—dropped to the ground like an old rag. Over it hovered the fog-like mist from the woman. . . . She reeled. . . . Her slender fingers caught hold of the bush for support. . . .

Then the gossamer-like vapor that surrounded my body—that had emanated from my body—was upon her. It surrounded her . . . it dissolved within her. She straightened up and heaved a great sigh. Her wonderful eyes gazed upon Harlow in token of surrender. They were filled with a peculiar light—a love-light—the light of the ages.

The eyes of the master were turned upon me—upon my withered form. Again I felt the strange, eerie sensation that I had felt before. Again the feeling of falling . . . falling . . . falling . . . of complete separation from everything. Then the mist cleared before my eyes.

I was again within my own body. Involuntarily my arm reached out and drew the soft, yielding form of the wonder-woman to me. She did not resist. Harlow noted the movement and grinned sardonically. Then, with a peculiar shrug of his shoulders, he turned away and pointed downward.

The body of the dead crone, the winding-cloth torn and disarranged, lay on the ground by the side of the bush. Over it hovered the gossamer-like vapor that Harlow had extracted from the body of the girl who stood by my side. Even as I gazed upon it, the fog dissolved itself within the dead and shriveled flesh. The twisted body seemed to shake itself. It arose. It turned its wrinkled face toward the master of us all—toward Harlow.

He muttered a command. Slowly, sadly, her feet making a peculiar dragging sound as she shuffled along, the hag crept across the brick terrace. She passed through the French window into the sun-parlor and dropped upon the divan where the wonder-woman had so recently rested.

We turned to Harlow. He was already half-way down the terrace in the direction of the car. We followed. The machine stood where we had left it. He climbed

wearily under the wheel. The girl made a movement to seat herself beside him, but he jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the rear seat.

"Have you forgotten the many days that we have been separated?" she asked sadly.

He chuckled, half to himself.

"I know that I hold your love—that no one can take you from me—so why should I be jealous?" he answered.

I could sense the angry crimson creeping into the woman's face.

"As cold-blooded as any lizard that ever crept across a cellar floor," she snarled, taking the seat beside me.

Again Harlow chuckled. Then he threw in the clutch. The car backed, turned, then glided like a thing alive down the narrow lane onto the cement highway again.

FROM the house came a shrill scream of terror. The music stopped with a crash. Then a woman screamed again. The girl beside me turned her sweet face toward me and pressed her fingers over mine.

"They have found it," she whispered. "They have found the horrible thing which was once my dwelling-place—the thing in which the soul of the woman whose body I now wear is imprisoned.

I clutched her in my mad embrace. She made no effort to evade me, yet there was no answering warmth in the pressure of her lithe body against mine.

"I love you! Love you! Love you!" I cried, forgetting in the intensity of my passion the man in the seat ahead. "Who are you, woman? Who are you?"

"To you I am Lenore—Lenore, the soulmate of Harlow, the master of us all," she answered. "I always have been and always will be. What matters what body my soul wears? In its day it has worn

many garbs. I have been a queen and a priestess. Oh, I have been many women in many places. But this shell, methinks, becomes me best of all—far better than that of the dried and wrinkled crone back yonder."

Her soft breath fanned my cheek. A wisp of her scented hair touched me. The subtle fragrance of her body was wafted to my nostrils. I was intoxicated. Forgotten was the fact that in order to give this woman—this intelligence—this soul—a dwelling-place I had helped rob another woman's soul of its rightful home. Forgotten was the hell that I had gone through. Forgotten was the fact that I was chained by invisible chains to this monster, Harlow—this master of souls, this purveyor of the black arts, this ghoul. Forgotten was everything in the thought that this woman, this glorious creature by my side, was living, breathing, and that I wanted her—that my whole being cried out for her.

Harlow, turning slightly in his seat, gazed back at us. He laughed—a harsh, sardonic, hellish laugh.

6. *A Million-Dollar Coup*

HARLOW! Is it possible for me to describe the man—if man he is? Metaphysician! Psychologist! Psychic! Necromancer! Sorcerer! Delver into everything weird, mysterious, uncanny, devilish! Alchemist! Philosopher! Hydromancer! Satanist! Stealer of souls and master of ghouls! A creature utterly without human impulse—a thinker only in terms of the abstract. A man who wallows in human misery and fattens on the blood of innocent victims. A man who cares only for the soul because, he says, the soul knows not the meaning of time and because the soul alone is life and intelligence.

To him the temporal body is only a

temporary dwelling-place for the soul—a thing to be discarded when worn out, as one discards an old suit of clothes or a salamander throws off its skin in the springtime. To him death is nothing. He can not—or will not—die. He professes to believe in a God; yet he is a practitioner of the Black Mass.

Because the soul merely transfers its abiding-place from one body to another he has no regard for human life. He snaps his fingers at murder. To kill, he says, is merely to destroy the shell. The soul, he claims, never dies.

Have I explained his weird philosophy? Perhaps not. I do not understand it myself. And my vocabulary is limited when speaking of such a man. As I have said, to him the human body is nothing. Therefore he is a man without human passions such as greed and jealousy. Take, for instance, Lenore and myself. To secure a proper dwelling-place for Lenore's soul he filched the body of the beautiful girl at the ball. He knew that it was inevitable that I would fall in love with her. He cared not the snap of his finger.

Knowing his views, I asked him one day why he went to so much trouble to secure the shell he desired when other and commoner women were to be had for the taking and with much less work—women who lived and breathed just as did the glorious girl he had reincarnated.

"A human body is a human body," I argued, knowing even as I spoke that I would be worsted. "What matters it, then, whether Lenore is beautiful or whether she is as homely as purgatory? Because, according to your theory, the body is merely the shell which houses the soul."

He turned to me with an enigmatical smile.

"True," he answered. "A diamond is a wonderful stone, and whether it be set

in brass or wood or iron it would still be a diamond. Yet the brass or wood or iron would not show its real beauty to the extent that platinum or gold shows it. The soul of my Lenore is a jewel beyond price—a jewel more wonderful than the soul of any man or woman I have ever met. Therefore I have provided a proper setting for it."

He turned back to his work, leaving me to digest his remark as I saw fit.

I HAVE said that Horatio Harlow is utterly devoid of human emotion. He is as cold-blooded as any lizard or water-newt that ever crawled on its belly through the muck and morass of the dismal swamp. Let me revert once more to Lenore to explain my meaning. Here is a wonder-woman—a creature so radiant that her beauty dazzles the eye. I thought that she was beautiful when I saw her that night in the sun-parlor, but then her soul was that of an ordinary woman—one of the common herd, as it were. She was a society butterfly, a pampered pet and nothing more. But with the essence of life of Lenore inside that wondrous body she becomes more than beautiful—she is divine. This woman is Harlow's. She belongs to him—she is his, body and soul—his soulmate. Yet he rarely gives her more than a passing glance, caring a million times more for her intellect than her body. For all he knows—or seems to care—she and I might sit and croon and love for hours at a time. He apparently pays no more attention to us than he would to a pair of goldfish in a glass tank.

I have tried to make love to her. I confess it. So far will she allow me to go and no farther. There is no warmth in her fair body when I press it to mine—no flutter of response. Yet she keeps me dangling at the end of her string, hoping

—ever hoping—that some day I may catch her off her guard and win her away from him. And yet she seems to have no fear, even though she possesses the uncanny power of reading my thoughts. Nor, as I have said, does Harlow seem to have a single jealous thought. I can not understand them.

I love this woman of Harlow's, ghoul though I know her to be, a creature as foul and degraded as is her master. Did I not see her assisting him in his hellish rites? Once I mustered up courage enough to question her regarding this. She looked at me wonderingly.

"Both the Romans and the Etruscans employed such methods of divination," she answered. "I remember in Rome we had *aruspices*, or officers, appointed for such duties. The entrails have ever been regarded as being the best method of learning the truth."

The Romans! She spoke of them as we would speak of the inhabitants of England or France. What a woman she is! For her I have passed through the fires of hell and suffered the tortures of the damned. For her I have sold my soul to the devil—for Harlow is the devil. And yet—even though I know now that she has betrayed me—I would forgive everything to feel the pressure of her rounded arms about me.

Harlow's beliefs are Lenore's beliefs. She tells me again and again that she still has remembrances of nights spent under the soft Egyptian sky. She declares that she is old—so old that she has forgotten when she first commenced to remember. She says that from the very beginning she and Harlow were mated—that they will remain affinities until the very end of time. And yet she allowed me to love her—to fondle her—up to a certain point. Why? I have asked myself that question a thousand times. Love, she says, is

but a passing fancy—a temporary mating of the sexes. Her body means nothing to her, for in her time she has occupied many, many shells. She expects to occupy many more before she is called to her Maker. What, then, is the answer to it all? Can it be that Harlow is using her to hold me to him? The man is cold-blooded enough to use even her in order to accomplish his hellish purpose. But let me go on.

The fact that Harlow chooses to appear in the body of a man past middle age means nothing to her. To her, just as to Harlow, it is the soul—the intellect—that counts. Soon the bodies they are both wearing will be dust. And above all she knows that she can hold mankind in the hollow of her hand because of her beauty. It is to Harlow's interest that she holds fools like myself.

Perhaps I have rambled on at too great length. But I have attempted in my feeble way to portray this strange pair—to acquaint those who read this screed with their weird and hellish philosophy. Their souls are gnawing at the very vitals of our civilization. Let us hope that something I may have written will keep other men from falling into the trap that I have stumbled into.

DAYS passed. Long, uneventful days. Lenore and I spent them wandering. Would that I could say that they were spent in the Elysian fields of love. Then my sacrifice would not have been in vain. Harlow spent them in poring over the accounts of poor old Dryson. The fire which had destroyed the temporary abiding-places of his and Lenore's souls had, for the nonce, thrown his plans out of gear, and it was necessary for him to re-adjust himself and reorganize. And, too, knowing that time meant nothing, he was content to lie about and laze and doze like

a great snake that has sated its appetite for blood. To carry out his experiments—for him science is the breath of life—money was needed in great quantities. Dryson had a small nest egg in the bank. Harlow drew it. It was only enough to finance his plans temporarily.

The old sanitarium he retained. There was something about it, set back as it was in the gloomy woods, the yard weed-grown, the iron shutters rusted, that seemed to fit in with his peculiar temperament. I have noted that men such as he are always associated with caves and ruined houses, with churchyards and vaults. Nor did he make any effort to rid himself of the maniacs in the rear of the house. He chuckled to himself as he told us that their howlings would serve to drown out the shrieks of his victims.

Finally he was ready for his coup—his coup to rehabilitate himself financially. His plan was clever—diabolically so. But to explain it, let me change tack and begin anew.

The whole world is familiar with the fact that Antone Loman, the steel magnate, died on the twentieth of last June. His sudden taking away was front-page news in every newspaper on the globe. So, too, was his peculiar will, read a few days after his burial. To his wife and son he left the bulk of his vast fortune. But to one Doctor Peter Dryson, owner of an obscure little sanitarium for the treatment of the insane, he left a million dollars.

The day that the terms of Antone Loman's will were made public, the newspaper reporters wore a pathway to the door of our little sanitarium. Sitting in an upstairs window, I gazed out at them as they trooped down the flagstone path. I chuckled with Lenore at the way Harlow's plans were working out. I, posing as the pseudo Dryson's assistant, watched him weep hypocritical tears as he told

again and again the story of his strange friendship with Antone Loman—a story untrue from start to finish.

A short paragraph in Loman's will made that million-dollar bequest front-page "copy." Many wealthy men leave that amount to friends and the world never knows of it, nor cares. The same paragraph made Dryson's face a familiar one to every newspaper reader in the world. Briefly, Loman stated in leaving the money to Dryson that, several years before, he had found himself suddenly growing mentally unbalanced. Antone Loman insane? He, the greatest man in the financial world, a maniac? Unwilling, because of his prominence, to consult any of the famous specialists of his acquaintance, he had sought out Doctor Peter Dryson, and, letting his family and friends think that he had gone to Europe, had placed himself under the specialist's care.

Dryson had cured him. And what was more to the point, he had refused to accept more than the usual fee, nor had he ever attempted to extort any additional sum in the years that followed. Therefore the magnate had left the million dollars to Dryson in the hope that he would use it in his experiments to benefit the mentally afflicted.

Little wonder that the newspaper reporters flocked to the sanitarium or that flashlights boomed, filling the gloomy interior with acrid smoke and causing the maniacs in the rear to howl and shriek until the air was filled with their ravings. Little wonder that the picture of Dryson became known overnight. For had the mental condition of Antone Loman become known, it would have caused a financial panic.

I, Hubert Van Gilder, sentenced to die for a murder I never committed, occupant of a body I never saw until a few days

ago, make this charge: Doctor Horatio Harlow, posing as Doctor Peter Dryson, whose body he had stolen, killed Antone Loman. Doctor Horatio Harlow forged the name of Antone Loman to that will. Antone Loman was never mentally degraded, nor did he even know Doctor Peter Dryson.

Now let me explain.

7. Harlow Wins Again

WHEN everything was ready for his coup, Harlow took a short vacation. Going to the city, he spent several days in studying the customs and everyday life of Antone Loman.

Immediately upon his return he took Lenore and me into his confidence and trained us carefully in our duties. Satisfied that we were letter perfect, he took us back to the city with him.

Upon some pretext he gained entrance to Loman's private office. I was with him. Lenore, meanwhile, remained in the car just outside. For a moment he discussed some trivial matter with the great financier. Then he caught the other off his guard. I could see his terrible eyes sparkle as they burned their way into the millionaire's brain. Loman started to get up, only to sink back into his chair again. Slowly, as if fighting against the power that was tearing his soul from his body, he succumbed. Above him rose a white, vaporish mist.

Harlow was working like a fiend. The sweat stood out on his forehead in great beads as he separated his own soul from its abiding-place. An instant later it entered the huge body of Antone Loman. He leaped to his feet. His own discarded body—the body of Doctor Peter Dryson—was in a chair on the opposite side of the desk. Into it he drove the soul of Antone Loman. He deadened the other's power of thought. Within the body of

Doctor Dryson was the spark of life and nothing more. The intellect was temporarily dead.

I assisted the shell of the doctor in which the financier's soul was imprisoned through the door.

"A slight attack of vertigo," I explained to the private secretary as we left the office.

Even before we were out of the big waiting-room, Harlow had pressed the button on the big, flat-topped desk.

"Get my lawyer!" I heard him snap to Loman's secretary in the millionaire's crisp tones. "Tell him to come immediately. I want to change my will."

So, while the will was being changed, the soul of Antone Loman, imprisoned in the body of Doctor Dryson—a soul benumbed and without the power of thought because Harlow so commanded—was in the automobile with Lenore and myself.

Horatio Harlow was too shrewd to make a mistake at this stage of the game. There were many, many things connected with the business affairs of Antone Loman that he did not know. He took no chances. He allowed no one else in the office while the lawyer drew up the new will. Loman's secretary typed it. Two of the clerks were called in to witness it. Then, pleading weariness, he left the office.

Reaching Loman's home, he retired immediately to his study on the plea of having some important matters to ponder over. He declined dinner. Shortly after dark he took a short walk, as was Loman's usual custom. The automobile was just around the corner. I was at the wheel, Lenore beside me. In the rear seat sat the body of Doctor Dryson. Opening the door, Harlow leaped inside. It took him but an instant to change bodies again with Antone Loman.

Three minutes later the real Loman left

the car, but with the doings of Harlow so indelibly impressed upon his mind that he imagined them to be his free and voluntary acts. His meeting with us in the automobile was, at Harlow's command, erased from his memory.

A WEEK passed . . . two weeks. Time enough for Harlow's ends. It was late at night when he commanded Lenore and me to meet him in the laboratory off from the office. In the rear of the house the maniacs howled and rattled the bars of their cages as if they scented the death that was in the air. We unlocked the door leading into the cell room. One of them more violent than the others shrieked at us and spat like an angry cat. His antics attracted Harlow's attention. He stopped with a cynical smile.

"The very man for our purpose," he chuckled.

Together we overpowered the poor devil and dragged him, howling and gibbering, back into the laboratory. We strapped him onto the operating-chair. I stepped back, expecting that Harlow would again resort to his hellish rites of divination. Instead, he took a syringe from the cabinet and, filling it with some colorless liquid, jammed the needle into the shrieking devil's arm. Then he pushed home the plunger.

"He will be dead in thirty seconds," he said quietly.

A second later the madman's ravings ceased. A startled look crept into his eyes. He glared at us pathetically. For an instant a look of sanity swept over his face.

"God!" he said hoarsely, as if knowing the fate that was soon to be his. "Oh, Mary, Mother of Christ, protect me!"

His muscles contracted spasmodically. He heaved a great sigh. He was dead.

Harlow turned to me.

"The essence of life—the soul—is a peculiar thing," he said coldly. "For instance, it is easy for me to separate the soul from its body. But it must have a resting-place. For only the Creator can separate soul and body and keep them apart for ever. Therefore I have killed this poor devil—a blessing to him. His soul goes to its Maker. His body belongs to me."

He motioned us to be quiet. He turned his face toward the city. Lenore and I, cowering in a corner, were silent as we watched him. His arms were extended in an attitude of supplication. From the ends of his fingers shot sparks. The lamps had been extinguished, yet the room was filled with a weird greenish-blue light. It danced and flickered, making grotesque shadows on the walls. It surrounded Harlow like the phosphorescence that so often surrounds one who has long been dead.

"Come!" he whispered. "Come, Loman! It is Harlow who calls! Harlow, your master. I command it!"

From out of the darkness came a great sigh—a mournful, wailing sigh. It was the sobbing of a soul in purgatory.

Through the strange, weird light drifted a white, fog-like vapor. It circled around Harlow for an instant. He caressed it, running his hands through it, molding it, it seemed, to suit his ends. And all the while he was gliding with it toward the body of the dead man on the chair—the man we had murdered. It settled down upon the clammy thing. It disappeared within him.

Harlow straightened up with a sigh of relief and ordered us to relight the lamps. This task completed, I turned toward the dead man again.

He was alive!

His eyes were open. He gazed at us

dully. Yet there was no intelligence, no comprehension in his look.

Harlow unbuckled the straps and lifted him to his feet. He stumbled back into his cell, a broken, subdued creature.

"Tomorrow we will notify his relatives that he is better," Harlow chortled. "Perhaps they will want to take him away with them."

Next morning the papers announced that Antone Loman had been found dead in bed. The verdict of the coroner's jury was heart disease.

I make this statement. Horatio Harlow, Master of Souls, killed Antone Loman with the power of his thought. I was a witness to the deed. I solemnly swear that the soul of Antone Loman is imprisoned within the body of the maniac in the pseudo Doctor Dryson's sanitarium.

8. *The End Draws Near*

MY TIME has come. I am to die within the hour. From where I sit I can look through my barred window and see the workmen completing the scaffold on which my life is to end. A moment ago they tied a bag of sand to the rope and dropped it through the trap to test the strength of the hempen cord and take the stretch out of it. Outside my cell a black-robed priest kneels and mutters his paternosters. He tried to talk to me; I sent him on about his business, but he persists in praying for me. As if prayer could help me! Harlow, not God, can save me. And Harlow, curse his foul soul, has deserted me. He promised to return and he has not kept his word.

They say that I am Oscar Schwengel, killer *de luxe*. What avail to tell them that they are mistaken—that I am Hubert Van Gilder? They would laugh at me. Perhaps they would call me insane and send me to an asylum. I have had enough

experience with such institutions. No, I would rather die than meet such a fate.

Yet I am Hubert Van Gilder. That is, my soul is confined within the body of Oscar Schwengel while his accursed soul is within my frame, the plaything of Horatio Harlow. Perhaps he is even now fondling Lenore as I have fondled her so many times in the past. I shudder when I think of it. Yet the writing of my story gives me pleasure and my jailers let me do as I please. They think that writing will keep my mind off my coming death.

This Schwengel is many times a murderer. He is a mental pervert. He is an atavism—a caveman. He thinks only in terms of blood.

Harlow, who rarely looks at a newspaper—a man to whom current events mean nothing and whose only thought is of his experiments—chanced to pick up a paper that had been wrapped about a package of supplies. There in glaring headlines was the story of Schwengel's foul career. It interested Harlow. He was filled with the desire to seize this rebellious soul, to experiment with it, to watch it writhe under the pin-pricks of his stronger will. For, just as the naturalist seeks out a new butterfly to add to his collection, so does something different in the human soul appeal to Harlow. The squirming and twisting of the essence of life means the same to him as the wriggling of a new species of bug means to the naturalist.

We had been idle for several days. I say this in a conservative sense, for Harlow's brain was never idle. Yet there had been little of moment happening. The three of us—he and Lenore and I—had made several excursions—pleasure trips, he called them. We had robbed a dozen cemeteries of their dead. Foul creature that he is, there is no attraction to him like cemeteries, dead things, swamps and dank morasses.

He had had a force of carpenters at work. Now his laboratory was equipped with a complete cooling system. The old house had been wired for electricity and a private system installed. Upon the shelves of our new morgue now rested dead bodies—the bodies of those we had filched from their graves. Under the influence of his powerful will Lenore and I had projected our souls into their moldering bodies. Clad in musty cerements we had cavorted and danced, talked and held high revelry.

Now, however, he was tiring of all these things. His active mind demanded a change. The wild, blood-saturated Oscar Schwengel offered him the mental stimulus that he needed.

He read the paper carefully. When he had finished, he turned to me.

"A mental pervert in many ways," he said thoughtfully, pointing down at the article with his long forefinger. "A throwback, an atavism, a caveman. He murdered his wife—her whole family—in a frenzy of rage because she burned the meat while cooking supper. He killed a policeman who attempted to arrest him. Before that he was mixed up in innumerable escapades. His entire life has been a series of outbreaks against modern civilization and its man-made laws. What a chance for observation if I but had him in my charge!"

For a long time he was silent. Then his face suddenly lighted up and he told me of his plan. Lenore joined in with him in urging me to help him. And I, poor dupe, in order to win her favor, fell in with it.

NEXT day we visited the penitentiary where Oscar Schwengel was confined. Harlow, masquerading as Doctor Peter Dryson, was received with open arms, thanks to the advertising he had se-

cured through Loman's will. He introduced me as his assistant. Then he asked permission to visit Schwengel alone with me, saying that he wished to study him. The warden, anxious to please so prominent a character, readily gave his consent. Ten minutes later we were in the cell with Oscar Schwengel.

Harlow played his cards well. For a few minutes he conversed with the arch-murderer, preparing him, without his knowledge, for the ordeal to come. Suddenly his face changed. I saw his eyes boring into Schwengel's soul and bidding it come forth. The killer *gasped*—sat suddenly upright. Then he dropped back, his eyes glazed. A mist-like vapor rose over him. It was tinted with red because of the blood that was on his soul.

Harlow turned to me. I was used to the sudden changes of my soul. The transfer took but an instant. I felt myself dropping. . . .

I found myself sitting in the chair occupied by Oscar Schwengel. *I was Schwengel!* And he, the bloodthirsty killer, occupied my body. He was dull, stupid. Harlow had seen to that. He almost stumbled as the master led him from the cell. The attendants did not note the difference.

Harlow turned to me just before the door clanged.

"The change is but for a short time," he whispered. "Have no fear, my friend. I will return for you soon."

THEY are ready for me. Five minutes from now my soul will be separated from Schwengel's body in accordance with the law's decrees. They will lead me to the scaffold just outside and there they will hang me by the neck until I am dead. My face will turn a purplish black and grow swollen just as Dryson's face did that night I saw him strangled in

the doorway. And once separated from my soul's abiding-place there will be no help for me. Even the power of Harlow can not then bring me back to earth. I am going to my Maker to be judged. God, what a lot of sins I must atone for!

I am writing this so that others will be warned. Let the world know what a foul beast Harlow is. Let the world know how he tricked me. Let the newspapers broadcast it from coast to coast. . . .

I hear them coming down the corridor. As I look through the barred window I can see a small group of men in the enclosure outside waiting for me. I am to be the star of the tragedy. How they will gape when I step upon the stage! I must write fast.

Harlow has failed me. . . .

But has he? God! Oh, God! I feel his power surging over me. . . . He is calling me. I must go. I must go. Harlow, master of my soul, commands me to come. Harlow—

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(From Prison City News)

WEIRD MIXUP IN PRISON ESCAPE

Supposed Dead Man Leaps From Morgue Slab
and Is Spirited Away in Closed Car

GOVERNOR ORDERS INVESTIGATION

Legislative Committee to Act Immediately—Physicians
Declare Themselves Baffled

A supposedly dead man escaped from the prison morgue this morning in one of the most sensational and weird prison breaks ever known. Two guards and one trusty are in the prison hospital as a result of the affair; all three on the verge of a mental breakdown. Warden Muckridge is making every effort to recapture the escaped man. A dozen armed posses are

scouring the countryside, they, with the prison guards engaged in the chase, making over three hundred men hunting for the escaped man.

The affair is clouded in mystery. Warden Muckridge issued a statement to the press which is, substantially, as follows:

Yesterday one of the convicts, James Sanders, sent up from San Merino county for forgery, was stabbed and supposedly killed by Thomas Conners, his cell mate. The latter had smuggled a knife into the cell and, during an argument with Sanders, drew it from its hiding-place before the guards could separate them, plunging it into the latter's heart.

The body of Sanders was taken to the prison morgue, where a post-mortem was performed by Doctor John B. Cameron, the prison physician, assisted by Doctors Wunderlich and Shively of this city. Their finding was to the effect that the point of the weapon penetrated the left ventricle, death being instantaneous.

Condemned Man Dies

Oscar Schwengel, the murderer, was to have been hanged at five-thirty o'clock this morning. Omar Mansard, morgue attendant, and Randall Ashton, another guard, together with Wilson Mann, a trusty, who act as his assistants, were making preparations in the morgue for the reception of the body.

Just as the prison bell rang at 5:30, the usual breakfast hour, Schwengel dropped dead, the result, according to the prison physician, of shock brought on by the fear of execution. He had been engaged up to the very last in writing what purported to be the story of his life. Examination proves it to be a weird, rambling statement in which he claimed to be one Hubert Van Gilder whose soul, according to the story, was confined within the body of Schwengel by Doctor Peter Dryson,

the eminent specialist on mental disorders who attracted so much attention a few weeks ago when he inherited a million dollars from the late Antone Loman, whose reason he saved.

Doctor Dryson recently visited Schwengel for the purpose of studying his mental condition, which undoubtedly accounts for the use of his name by the condemned man. Schwengel, in his statement, accuses Doctor Dryson of being one Doctor Horatio Harlow. That the man was deranged there is now not a doubt.

Dead Man Comes to Life

Here, however, is where the weird part of the story comes in. Coincident with the ringing of the prison bell and the sudden death of Schwengel, Sanders, the man lying naked on the morgue slab to all appearances dead, leaped to his feet with a ringing shriek.

"Harlow has kept his word!" Mansard, Ashton and Mann, the morgue attendants, assert that he shouted. Then: "I come, Master! I come!"

Naked, with the gaping wound in his chest, he darted through the morgue door and out onto the street. The attendants were too badly frightened to offer any resistance.

Automobile Is Waiting

Just outside the prison gates an automobile with drawn shades was standing with engine running. Just across the street from the morgue, which is outside the prison walls, Alexander O'Connell, a guard stationed in one of the sentry boxes, saw the naked man dash onto the pavement and leap into the machine.

O'Connell fired one shot from his rifle and is certain that the bullet found its

mark in the naked body. However, an arm was stretched forth from behind the curtains and the escaping man was pulled into the car, which dashed away at full speed.

O'Connell gave the usual alarm and the siren was sounded. But meanwhile, as is often the case when there is an execution, the convicts became unruly, and by the time order was restored, the machine had disappeared in the distance. Owing to the semi-darkness, Guard O'Connell was unable to obtain the license number.

Dryson Makes Statement

An inquiry sent to Doctor Dryson brings back the reply that he never heard of Hubert Van Gilder, whose name is mentioned in the long screed left by murderer Schwengel. The only time he ever met the latter, he asserts, was on the occasion of his visit to the prison a week ago. He also denies acquaintance with Sanders or any one by the name of Horatio Harlow. The directory of the United States Medical Association fails to give the name of Doctor Harlow as ever having been licensed.

Meanwhile the mystery is: How did James Sanders, stabbed in the heart, manage to hoax three reputable physicians? In spite of what has transpired, all three of the men who performed the post-mortem examination have signed a statement reasserting that Sanders was dead.

Governor Swift has ordered an immediate investigation into the matter by a legislative committee which was appointed at the last session of the state legislature and which has not yet completed its examination into the prison break of a year ago.

