

EERIE STORIES

*Startling Adventures
in Chilling Horror*

AUGUST, 1937

VIRGINS OF THE STONE DEATH (Novel)	GATES ALEXANDER	10
<i>The glorious young body of the girl Terry Grant loved was fated to feel the cold embrace of death, instead of his own warm, protecting one—as her shapely limbs turned slowly into solid stone!</i>		
THE SOUL-SCORCHERS' LAIR (Cover Story)	RONALD FLAGG	36
<i>He had a mad desire to scorch his wife's soul, sending the intense heat of a blow-torch through her flesh.</i>		
CORPSE GIRL'S RETURN	ERIC LENOX	44
<i>She was alluring, desirable—but the newshawk shuddered. For he knew she had slept the sleep of death with the cadavers in the morgue.</i>		
DEVIL'S BREW	BRANTON BLACK	52
<i>Sardonically, Gavin Clark planned murder, and visioned his trembling young wife bestowing her caresses upon a corpse. . . .</i>		
HER ISLE OF HORROR	CLIFF HOWE	55
<i>Loretta's dark-eyed invitation made the young investigator face the horrific monsters of her storm-lashed island.</i>		
THE PAIN MASTER'S BRIDE	REXTON ARCHER	67
<i>It was stark horror that Edmund Neymores learned when he witnessed the ghastly torment of a helpless girl as she posed for a statue of agony.</i>		
SINISTER SKEIN	HORACE STONER	76
<i>Trooper Trant had to untangle a bloody murder skein—depending on the help of a beautiful girl who didn't trust him because he had seen her wearing the briefest of clothing.</i>		
REHEARSAL WITH DOOM	TERRENCE FLINT	86
<i>Middle-aged Graham Munster arranged a rehearsal with doom to force his pretty young ward to become his bride.</i>		
LUST FOR BLOOD	CLIFFORD GRAY	94
<i>The boat club's secretary floated over corpse currents to a madman's hideaway where the price of life was blood.</i>		
MATE OF THE BEAST	LEON DUPONT	102
<i>Len Oakley found that no mortal man could steal a bride of the beast.</i>		
TERROR'S TOMB	JOHN GREGORY	107
<i>Private Detective Manton wanted to know why lovely Anne Seymour went willingly into a pit of terror with a parchment-faced fiend.</i>		
STEP-DAUGHTER TO GREED	PETER REGINALD	119
<i>Terrified, the girl forced her trembling legs to carry her into the tomb of the dead—to search for an inheritance in hell. . . .</i>		

*Cover by Norman Saunders
From "The Soul-Scorchers' Lair."*

Published bi-monthly by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Application pending for second-class entry at Post Office at Springfield, Mass. Title registration applied for at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1937, by Magazine Publishers, Inc. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates, address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

Twelve Issues, \$1.50; Single Copies, Fifteen Cents

The Pain Master's Bride

Edmund Neymores felt chill horror at sight of Fulton Xavier's sensational statue of a man in pain. But Neymores did not know real horror until he saw the ghastly torment of a helpless girl as she posed for a newer masterpiece.



By Rexton Archer

STANDING alone in front of the statue, Edmund Neymores could scarcely tear his eyes from the thing. "The most masterly presentation of hideous grotesqueness I have ever seen. Beyond the conception of the normal brain," he muttered.

It was ten minutes past closing time at the Art Institute. Most of the evening, Neymores had spent watching the people as they crowded around

Gloatingly, his eyes traveled over the graceful contours.

Xavier's sensational statue. It is not often that a totally new artist achieves a masterpiece. But Neymores had noticed that not a single person in the crowd could suppress a shudder upon

looking at the thing of bronze. One old beggar woman had actually fainted. Mentally, Edmund Neymores resolved to hit that statue hard in his general interest column in tomorrow's paper.

The statue was the naked figure of a man lying on his back, knees drawn up close to his belly, arms twisted, and fingers knotted together. Every muscle was craftily molded. The bronze face was a contortion of agony. The twisted lips, the gaping mouth seemed to indicate that the figure was choking on a shriek that was beyond utterance.

"It—it's not a statue," Neymores muttered with a grimace. "It's a tormented soul captured in metal!" His eyes dipped to the placard at the base of the thing:

MAN IN PAIN

by

FULTON XAVIER

There was something about the hands—Neymores forced himself to touch them. An altogether inexplicable sensation of repugnance passed over him. Yes, there were only nine twisted fingers—not an oversight on the artist's part, for there was a sort of a stump where the digit had been. Xavier had followed his model in perfect detail. That was what made Neymores shudder. It wasn't the statue itself. Where, in the name of heaven, had Xaxier got his model?

He turned abruptly and clicked across the polished floor. Yes, he'd hit "Man in Pain" hard in tomorrow's paper. Time that art, too, made some effort to get back to normalcy!

At the bottom of the steps leading to the boulevard, Neymores met Jasper Felps, a man who occupied the apartment adjacent to his. Neymores detained him. "Have you seen the exhibit yet?" he asked. Jasper Felps snarled: "Hell, yes! what a nightmare! And that thing made by Xavier. I'll never get it out of my mind! But knowing who made it, I'm not surprised."

Jasper Felps had no reason to love Fulton Xavier, Neymores knew. There was something about a fraudulent business deal in which Xavier and Felps had both had a hand. Then came the law. The wealthy Mr. Xavier was above reproach. Felps took the brunt of the burden—prison and ruin. The disgrace of it all had killed Felps' father. But Xavier had waxed fat, hoarded the profit, and maintained the respect of the world. Now, at fifty, Jasper Felps was a hard working electrician. At forty-eight, Xavier had retired to dabble in art and music, to give money lavishly to charities, to inherit the immortality that a public benefactor sometimes unjustly deserves.

"I've my car here, Felps," Neymores offered.

"Thanks, but I'm not going home now." And Jasper Felps hurried off in the opposite direction.

"Funny kite," Neymores muttered. He lighted a cigar and walked slowly down the street to where his car was parked. He snapped open the door of his car, put his foot on the running board, and suddenly jerked back. He stood there staring at some black, misshapen object that huddled on the cushions of the front seat. From the gloom within the sedan, a thin, white hand darted out. Fingers, sharp and pointed as claws, clutched at his coat sleeve. A gray, shriveled face, beaded with tiny black eyes, peered up at him from between strands of dirty, disheveled hair.

"Good Mr. Neymores," came a thin, crackling voice. "Munchy always called ye good Mr. Neymores, and I know you'll help me and my Munchy, won't ye, Mr. Neymores?"

Neymores fumbled along the door post, found the dome light switch, and pressed it on. As he had judged from the voice, the person who had appropriated the front seat of his car was an old woman. She was wearing a ragged dress of filthy silk stuff, and, in spite of the warm night, a plaid shawl was tied over her head. He rec-

ognized her immediately as the woman who had fainted in the Art Institute that evening. Aside from that, he could not remember ever seeing her before. As for "her Munchy" he hadn't the slightest idea to whom she had referred.

It was mere curiosity that prevented him from sending the woman about her business. The city abounded with creatures of this kind—some who deserved charity, and others who counterfeited both their ailments and their poverty. Neymores did not reply at once. He closed the door of the sedan, walked around, and got in under the wheel. Then he asked, "Just what is the matter? Who is Munchy?"

"Why you know Munchy!" the old woman shrilled. "He's my son. You buy all your pencils from him."

Neymores remembered now. Munchy must be the ageless blind man who stood at the corner of Eighth and Wentworth Streets. And that was very strange! During the past week, Neymores could not remember seeing Munchy at his accustomed post. "Is Munchy sick?" he inquired.

"No-no," the woman whimpered. "He's gone. For ten days he has not come back."

Neymores' mind fired with sudden inspiration. "Tell me," he said earnestly, "why you fainted in the institute when you saw Xavier's statue."

"I do not know what you mean," whimpered the woman. "But I know that the metal man all curled up on his back looked like my Munchy!"

Neymores pressed a five dollar bill into the crone's hand. That would keep her from starving. "Now, you'll have to go," he told her. "I'll see what I can do to find your son." He had suddenly remembered that the blind man had one missing finger on his left hand!

That settled it! Beyond a doubt, Munchy had served as the model for Xavier's "Man in Pain." But by what hellish torment had this perverted artist twisted the placid features of the blind man into a resemblance of

the hideous metal thing that had caused a sensation at the exhibit? What had become of Munchy since the completion of the statue?

Neymores hurried the old woman from his car. Then, he drove to the nearest telephone booth, called the Missing Persons Bureau, and described the blind pencil vender.

SHERINGHAM COURT belies its grand name. It is something of a Soho mixed with the tinsel finery of a Montmartre together with a filth and squalor all its own. Here, artists and scribblers have made their dwellings and have counterfeited the Bohemian life. Among all this tawdriness, Sheringham Court boasts one building where money created something that was genuinely picturesque — Fulton Xavier's new studio. Faced with clean stucco, the upper stories jut out three feet beyond the lower. Glazed tile insets, attractive green shutters, and blossoming window boxes all contributed their bit towards brightening up what would ordinarily have been called a drab city street.

As the steady thrum of Neymores' car stopped in front of the Xavier studio, soft melodious music floated to his ears. He listened for a moment. An organ was playing "In a Monastery Garden." Neymores knew that it was Fulton Xavier himself who played. Why? Because the full-bodied bass notes were entirely lacking. For all Xavier's money could not manipulate those wooden organ pedals. Xavier could not walk. A railroad accident had robbed him of his legs.

Knocking at the studio door brought a servant. "I am sorry," said the man, "but Mr. Xavier is not here."

"I am sorry," retorted Neymores, "but I know that he is here." He elbowed his way into the hall. "Please inform him that I am from the *Evening Record*. I would like to interview him in regard to his sensational statue, 'Man in Pain.'"

"I will see, sir," said the servant. He turned stiffly and left the room.

Neymores listened carefully. The organ continued to play a few more bars, then stopped abruptly. Neymores smiled. Fulton Xavier had one weakness—vanity.

The servant re-entered the hall to inform Neymores that Mr. Xavier would see him in the conservatory.

Passing through a small library, Neymores was ushered into the presence of Xavier himself.

Fulton Xavier was seated in a high-backed chair. A woolen robe covered his lap and dropped to the floor concealing the stumps of his amputated legs. His domelike head was hairless and his beetling black brows divided equally his pink forehead and white face. His features were hard, his lips colorless. His smile was an artificial thing devoid of all pleasantness.

"You have, then, seen 'Man in Pain?'" he inquired immediately.

"I have," replied Neymores. "It is hideous. If you conceived it, I am tempted to say that yours is not a strictly normal brain!"

Color flamed across Xavier's parchment face. "You—you dare—" he sputtered.

"I would dare much to discover what has become of a certain blind pencil vender who has been missing for the past ten days."

"Why, damn you! What has that to do with me? Why do you come here with your blind beggars? I know no one who sells pencils! Impertinence to the greatest genius of all times!" The man's wrath shook the massive chair in which he sat.

"I have had the impertinence to inform the police of the disappearance of that blind beggar. I have proof that Munchy—that is his name—was the model for 'Man in Pain.' Suppose, Mr. Xavier, that they should find Munchy—dead. Your bronze statue can be identified beyond a doubt as the image of that blind man—distorted though his features are by pain and torment. Murder, Mr. Xavier, is an unpleasant word!" Neymores crossed the room to the wealthy art patron's chair. His

hand descended heavily on the man's shoulder. "An unpleasant word, but one I shall be forced to use over the telephone in five minutes unless you give me information concerning the man who modeled for your statue!"

The shoulder beneath Neymores' hand shook with silent sobs. "I know nothing of your beggar. Why do you torment me? Money, I know! Here—" he fumbled in his inner coat pocket and tugged out his check book. "How much do you want?"

"Perhaps," said Neymores in an icy tone, "I am the first man you have ever met whom you cannot buy. But I am only the first. You have not met the gentlemen of the homicide squad, I take it."

With an angry motion of his hand, Xavier threw aside the woolen robe, seized two small, rosewood crutches that leaned against the arms of his chair, and squirmed to the floor. Balancing himself on his stumps, he looked up at Neymores. Tears filled his eyes. "Look at me," he implored. "Just look at me—dwarfed in the very prime of life, perfectly helpless. Yet you would take the one thing that is dearest to my heart away from me."

"Answer my question and I will leave this house at once. Where is Munchy?"

"Damn your Munchy!" Xavier seized the tail of Neymores' coat and shook it angrily. Then anger passed. His face once more became the color of parchment. The dark eyes darted furtively about the room. Again, he tugged at Neymores' coat. "If I tell you a secret that only two human beings know, will you promise to leave me alone and keep silent?"

Neymores hesitated. "If you do not confess a crime, I can promise."

"Come then," said Xavier; and using his crutches with remarkable skill, he hopped across the room towards the door at the rear. He opened the door and hopped into a small, brilliantly lighted chamber that was obviously his work shop. Unformed and partly formed lumps of clay were heaped

upon low work tables. Clay smeared smocks and modeling tools littered the room. Xavier stumped over to one of the tables, picked up a small clay figure, and held it above his head. It might have represented a man, but so ill-formed, so utterly lacking in proportion that Neymores could not be certain.

"This," said Xavier, "is my masterpiece!"

Neymores stared at the thing. Xavier was completely insane. A child could have fashioned a more perfect image in mud; and whatever could be said against "Man in Pain," it was certainly perfectly proportioned and complete in every detail.

"Fool, don't you see!" Xavier shouted. "This is the finest thing I have ever done. You are learning the inmost secret of a genius!" He paused, moistening his colorless lip. "My one ambition was to be a great sculptor. I dreamed of art unborn—yes, dreamed until I believed myself to be an artist. Some day I would see my name upon the most sensational statue ever exhibited in America. All this, I saw in my dreams. Now, do you understand why I could not have seen the man who modeled for 'Man in Pain?'" A chuckle rasped his throat. "It is the greatest hoax of the age. Today, Xavier is on the lips of every art critic. Yet, here in my hand, I hold my masterpiece!" With an oath, he hurled the clay thing to the floor where it shattered to bits.

"You mean," said Neymores softly, almost compassionately, "that you were not the artist who fashioned 'Man in Pain?'"

Slowly, Xavier nodded his head. "That is my secret."

UNDERSTANDING crept over Neymores. Xavier, who had bought what the world would sell, had been thwarted in his greatest ambition. He had been denied the artistic skill for which he longed. Yet, even greater than his longing for artistic expression, was his hunger for fame

as an artist. Insane? Of course—the insanity of strange vanities, grandiose illusion!

"Then, if you did not make the statue, who did?"

Earnestly, Xavier replied, "I have no more idea than you. He is a man with a long, yellow beard. Sometimes I fancy he is the reincarnate Leonardo Da Vinci. He came to me, told me that he was a great sculptor to whom fortune had been unkind. I made him this proposition: If he would create works of art in my name, I would pay him a large sum of money. His studio is directly below this one. He has a secret entrance, and no one knows that he is the real sculptor of my statues!"

"Then I—"

A half-muffled scream broke through Neymores' sentence. It sounded as if it came from the floor at his feet. "What was that?" he snapped.

Xavier stood stiffly on his stumps, every sense alert. "It—it sounded like a woman."

Neymores sprang to Xavier, seized him by the shoulders, and shook him until his teeth rattled. "Have you ordered any more of your damned statues?" he snarled.

Xavier's eyes bulged. He nodded, unable to speak.

The entire horror of what that scream portended slashed across Neymores' brain. This fiendish artisan who created Xavier's nightmares in bronze must torture his victims in some hellish manner in order that the metal faces of his finished products might reflect a pain beyond human conception. "We've got to get down there," he shouted in a frenzy. "He may be killing her, or—or something worse!"

Something behind Neymores creaked like a rusty hinge. A rasping shriek from Xavier. Neymores pivoted. Behind him, a door in the floor had opened. Standing on the edge of the yawning pit was a strange, foreboding figure—a man whose face was covered from eyes to chin with a mass of curling yellow hair. A white robe dropped

from his shoulders to his feet—and it was spattered with crimson! In his right hand, he held a thick, black automatic. Not a sound passed his lips. He merely beckoned with one crooked finger of his left hand—beckoned towards the pit.

There was no mistaking his meaning. Neymores had seen the lust to kill in a man's eyes before. There was but one thing to do. He advanced towards the sinister, bearded figure. Evidently, Xavier, too, understood the meaning of the man's gesture. Neymores could hear him stumping along behind. Silently, the robed figure pointed to the opening. Looking down, Neymores saw a narrow flight of steel steps. Below was total darkness.

"I—I can't go down steps. You know that!" Xavier whimpered.

Still the crooked finger pointed. Xavier inched nearer the opening. Suddenly, the robed man's left hand shot out, gripped Xavier by the shoulder, twisted him around, and shoved him into the opening. The legless man was thrown down the steps. His hoarse cries of pain and terror blasted up from the darkness.

Lips within the yellow beard spoke.

"Intruder," the voice cut, "you know how to use steps."

Mechanically, Neymores obeyed. His feet found each step in turn as he worked his way down into the blackness. Below the stairs, he could hear Xavier groaning. When at last he found firm flooring beneath him, he heard the trap above him close. Brilliant electric lights illuminated the room. Neymores involuntarily gasped at the strange spectacle that spread before him.

A glass vat fully twelve feet in length occupied the center of the room. He judged it to be cubical. It was filled within a foot of the brim with a brilliant blue fluid. Next to the great vat was an enameled basin eight feet long and half as wide. Lying stark naked in this basin was a man. His throat was slashed from ear to ear,

and a crimson pool of his own blood bathed his body.

Bound and gagged in a straight chair was what first appeared to Neymores to be a negress. She was wearing a short, black tunic. Upon a second glance, he saw that the woman's features were obviously Caucasian. Face, body, and garment had been coated with some black substance. She was apparently unharmed and fully conscious, though her eyes were staring wildly at the ghastly scene.

NEYMORES jerked his eyes away. The shock of it all had numbed his wits. That was the one thing to be avoided at all costs! He forced himself to look calmly at the robed man. Evidently, while Neymores had been engrossed in the horrific revelations of the room, the bearded man had lowered a large metal cage over the recumbent form of Xavier. The latter, he noticed, had been stunned by his fall but was gradually coming around. Goldenbeard stood beside the cage, his automatic still in his hand. Pushing his foot between the bars of the cage, he goaded Xavier into consciousness. The cripple groaned and twisted to a sitting position.

"I am fulfilling your orders, Xavier," said the bearded one. "The subject of your second great work was to be 'Judgment.' It was to be composed of two life-size figures—a man and a woman. The man was to have the impassive face of a judge; the woman was to have the tortured features of the condemned. You will see how well I have chosen the models. The man in the basin was a worthless vagrant. He agreed to model for ten dollars. In order to preserve his placid features, I was forced to take his life before the 'art work' began.

"Bound in the chair, you see the female subject. In spite of the liberal coating of graphite I have applied to her fair skin, you may be able to recognize her."

Xavier's eyes strained in an effort to see the woman in the chair. Sud-

denly, his lower jaw sagged open. "My God!" he breathed. "My daughter!"

"Your daughter," the bearded man mocked. "Hers shall be the immortality of bronze. This unfortunate intruder—" he indicated Neymores—"I shall be forced to kill because he knows our methods—or can guess them.

"Then, I shall leave this building for all time. You will be left alone in this room—I will remove your cage from above—and there will be a little hint to the police. Though the police have not yet learned the truth about 'Man in Pain,' when they raid the Xavier studio, they will find the great Xavier, the great sculptor, surrounded by his victims in various stages of the process. Tonight, you sacrifice human beings on the altar of art! And no amount of denying, after your boasted art abilities, will ever convince the police that you are not the sole murderer of these unfortunates!

"But at the same time you are going to witness more than all this, my friends," the madman went on. "Miss Xavier's father is going to see his own daughter wed to Death himself as though to a mortal man. For besides the exquisite torment she will endure, my apparatus will make her experience every sensation of which the human body is capable—yes, besides agony, there will be exhilaration ecstasy, joy and almost unendurable delight combined with agony so stark and pure as to be sheer beauty itself."

The bearded one turned fiendishly to face Neymores directly. "You do not yet know the full beauty of this girl," he almost chuckled, gesturing at the short tunic she wore. "But it will do you no good to watch—no good at all."

As full realization of the bearded fiend's purpose flashed upon Neymores' mind, a shout burst from his throat. "You're crazy! You can't pull a stunt like this!"

"I correct you," said the bearded one. "I have pulled a stunt like this. Do you remember the blind pencil vender? He became immortalized as

'Man in Pain.' Do you wonder how I succeeded in capturing his tortured emotions in metal? I did it right here. In his blissful ignorance, Xavier supplied my every need—but did so in his own name. Do you wonder at my methods? Then, I am about to show them to you upon the person of Xavier's lovely daughter.

"But first, to manacle your hands—" Goldenbeard picked up a chain from the floor, stepped briskly behind Neymores, and ordered, "Hands behind you!"

With the fiend's gun jabbing into his back, there was nothing to do but obey. In another moment, the chain was tightened about his wrists and fastened with a padlock. Then strong cord was tied about his ankles.

Swiftly the satanic maker of statues hurried close to the girl. For a moment he hovered over her, then tore the tunic from her. Softly, gloatingly his eyes traveled over the graceful, swelling contours of her bosom and thighs.

"Yes, yes," he sniggered sardonically, "this will be one of the very best masterpieces of art that I shall leave behind."

Neymores stared, fascinated, at the starkness of the girl's disattire—which would have been made hideous by the darksome coating of the graphite, had it not been for the beauty nature had modeled throughout her figure. He could not help noting, even in a moment of such horror, that the curves of her breasts and thighs were so feminine as to be almost voluptuous.

The killer hurried to the wall, untied a strand of hemp rope, and pulled on it. Looking up at the ceiling, Neymores saw a metal hoist to which rope and grappling hooks were attached. The crane moved until it was directly above the chair in which the girl was bound. At the killer's manipulation, the grapples lowered, to the back of the chair.

He then crossed to the girl, fastened the hooks, saying as he did so, "Miss Xavier's body is coated with graphite

which makes her an electrical conductor. To establish the connection, I fasten a metal band around her head—so. One of our wire leads goes to the metal head band. In the glass vat, we have a solution of blue vitriol and the second electrode in the form of a heavy copper plate. Current passing from one electrode to the other through the copper sulphate will deposit a film of copper upon the graphite-covered body of Miss Xavier. Now, the current we shall use will be small so that Miss Xavier can suffer exquisite pain without it killing her. In that way, we can capture every tortured expression, every convulsed muscle in the metal itself!"

Goldenbeard pulled on his ropes, and the chair containing the girl was hoisted into the air and wheeled above the tank containing the blue vitriol. Very slowly, the killer lowered the helpless girl towards the surface.

In his cage, Xavier clenched the bars, shouted, threatened, and hopped up and down until his face became purple. Neymores was too horrified at what he saw to do more than stare. The girl was lowered until one slender foot was immersed in the blue fluid. Then the killer crossed to an electrical switch and turned on the current. Muscles in the girl's foot tightened and twitched. Her blackened face instantly became seamed with lines of agony.

Then for a moment the girl's body relaxed, only to commence a gradually increasing tremble that moved the flesh of stomach, torso and thighs as though by the manipulation of unseen hands. Suddenly she stiffened and arched her back violently. A second later the girl's body relaxed abruptly. But soon she writhed agonizedly with every limb, and tormented gasps and weak cries came through the gag that was tight-bound across half the convulsed features of her face.

"Xavier!" Neymores whispered. "Xavier, if you can raise your cage up on edge a little. Try it. Try anything that will attract his attention."

Panic fled from the cripple's face. With a desperate effort, he wrenched at the base of the cage. It raised a few inches and dropped again into place.

FROM across the room, the bearded man saw what Xavier was trying to do. Yet Neymores knew that he dared not kill the cripple. If he did, there would be no logical place to rest the blame for the fiendish crimes. With a snarl, he leaped across the room. "Stop that!" he shouted. Xavier's arms snaked through the bars, fastened upon the fiend's smock, and clung there. The killer laughed at Xavier's determined efforts.

While they struggled, Neymores dropped to the floor, doubled himself up, and worked his long arms down towards his ankles. Inches more—just inches. He had done the trick any number of times when he was a kid. He tried again and got his manacled wrists to the back of his heels. He contracted his muscles as much as possible. The chain slipped over his heels, over his toes, and came up in front of him. Another moment, and his fingers had ripped the cord from his ankles.

Then he was on his feet running up behind the killer. Xavier was giving the man so much trouble that it was not until Neymores was ready to spring that the bearded one had a chance to spring away. Neymores whirled his chained wrists above his head and brought them flailing down. The steel chain caught the man in the head. It was probably mere accident that his automatic roared. Even as Neymores and the killer fell together, the reporter saw a red-eyed wound appear in the forehead of Fulton Xavier. The full weight of Neymores' body landed upon the killer's back. The man's gun skated across the floor.

Completely winded by the fall, it was a second before the killer could continue his resistance. As he squirmed over on his back in an effort to throw off Neymores, the reporter's manacled wrists beat down again. This

time the steel links struck the man full in the face. Blood drooled from the corners of his mouth, drenching his beard with crimson. He lay perfectly still.

Neymores got to his feet. A glance showed him that the padlock connecting the loops of the chain about his wrists could be easily broken. His first thought, however, was for the girl. He ran across the room and yanked open the switch that controlled the electric current running through the vat of vitriol. Returning to the glass vat, he saw that her graphite-covered foot was already tinged with copper plate. Still, she was fully conscious.

And, evidently attracted by the sound of a shot, the whole place was filled with blue-coated police by the time Neymores had lowered the girl to the floor.

"Holy smoke!" gasped a fat sergeant as he clattered down the steps. "Will you look at the shambles! Why, it's the bright boy from the *Record*. How'd you get messed up in this, Neymores?"

"A long story," replied the reporter, "beginning with a missing pencil venter named Munchy."

"Yeah, I know. We were all posted to keep an eye open for him. Where is he?"

"Munchy is in the Art Institute—"

"Well, that's a fine place for a beggar," the sergeant interrupted.

"He was buried alive," continued Neymores, "in a sarcophagus that slowly crept upon him—a sarcophagus of copper to which a bronze finish was added for artistic effect."

The sergeant's eyes popped. "Say, that sounds crazy! Who's that old Father Time there on the floor with the whiskers on? Who's that gal? Who's the guy with the slashed throat?"

"The man in the basin was another subject to be electroplated. The girl is

Miss Xavier. She's been covered with graphite preparatory to being electroplated alive! 'Man in Pain' you will find to be Munchy, the pencil venter. He was also electroplated alive. That is how the 'artist' managed to get that hideous expression on his 'statue's' face. But, quit asking questions and get that poor girl to the hospital. They'll have to get that black stuff off of her.

"As to the killer, I believe he is a man who hated Xavier because of a business deal that ruined him and killed his father. He's crazy as a bed-bug, but was clever enough to play on Xavier's vanity. He knew that sooner or later someone was bound to discover that Xavier's statues were simply the cadavers of murdered people plated with metal. Nobody but the killer and Xavier knew that Xavier wasn't the real creator of the statues. With Xavier's name plastered all over the statues, there wouldn't be a jury in the country that would believe Xavier was not the murderer. It was the bearded man's idea of vengeance—the disgrace of trial, the frantic and futile efforts to escape the chair, and eventually the death of the condemned but innocent man." Neymores crossed to where the bearded man lay. Seizing the yellow hair, he jerked it away. The pale face of Jasper Felps glared up at him.

For a long time Neymores struggled with a mental picture of the ordeal the beautiful girl had endured. Even when he learned that she had recovered in the hospital, he did not know whether it would be right to try and see her. But he finally went to receive the girl's thanks for saving her life.

"Why not?" he reasoned. "Perhaps they had thus been destined to meet. And with true, spiritual love between them, the beauty she possessed could no longer be sullied in his mind by a ghastly memory of her hellish experience.