

10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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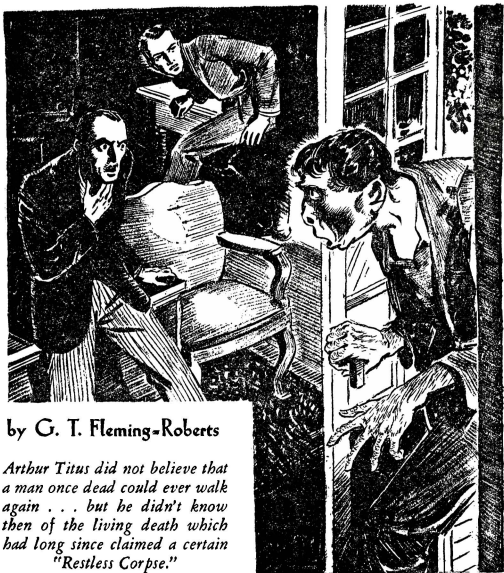
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THE RESTLESS CORPSE



by G. T. Fleming-Roberts

Arthur Titus did not believe that a man once dead could ever walk again . . . but he didn't know then of the living death which had long since claimed a certain "Restless Corpse."

ON TURNING its prow back towards the Florida coast, the launch swept by the sandy point where Arthur Titus was standing. He was very sorry at that moment to be left alone on the wet, sandy beach. Fog swallowed at the little boat until nothing re-

mained of it but the diminishing splutter of its motor.

When there was nothing more to watch seaward, Titus turned his back on the water that slapped and sucked against the sand. Smoke Island presented itself to him—a hundred yards of beach in three

directions; walls of mist in front, darkened by what must have been the shadow of the island's jungle-thick verdure—and that was all. Smoke-gray fog, sticky sand beach, sucking sea. . . .

"It's crazy," he said aloud and to no one. "Absolutely insane—this whole island and anybody who'll set foot on it!" That pronouncement was meant to include Arthur Titus, even if he was there at a price.

He sat down on his kit-bag, propped his feet on his briefcase, and waited. He was expected. Surely, they would send someone for him. But whether or no, he had firmly resolved not to set foot in the fog-draped jungle without a guide. As he sat there, he remembered his two fears—snakes and willow, blond women.

Now, clump-shuffling through the sand, came the sound of footsteps; but he could see no one. A little shudder trickled along his spine. It is not pleasant to have eyes and not see that which you can hear, he reflected.

"Halloo-o-o there, Titus!" came a not unpleasant voice from the direction of the jungle.

Arthur Titus sprang to his feet and shouted back. Fog seemed to seal his lungs, and it was like shouting in a dream.

Someone must have heard him, though, for the footsteps came closer. Then a dark spot against the mist begot arms and legs and eventually became a man.

"I heard your boat popping, Mr. Titus," said a tall, aesthetic looking man as he extended his hand in welcome.

Titus had met Kenneth Blake once or twice in Tampa. He looked much older now, for Titus remembered him as a college youth. But then, Smoke Island could bring gray hairs over night!

Blake picked up Arthur's kit and turned towards the jungle. "We'll get started towards the house," he said. "It's not particularly a cheerful place, as you've

doubtless guessed. But this beach, the endless gray sea mingled with gray sky, it's—it's God-awful," he concluded with a shudder.

"Do we go through the woods?" Titus nodded apprehensively towards the jungle. He was thinking of snakes.

"Yes," replied Blake. "But right at the edge of the undergrowth Uncle Ralph has laid a concrete walk. It's really very pleasant walking of a morning when the fog lifts."

That was cheering. The fog did sometimes lift then, even on Smoke Island.

Titus remembered little of that walk to the house. He had a general impression of hanging moss, lichen-covered tree trunks, and a prolific growth of greenery that bled a continual sticky sweat.

"Have you been on the island long?" he asked. He was still wondering at Kenneth Blake's graying temples.

"Two days," replied the man. "Too long," he added. "Uncle Ralph sent for us—Dorothy and me. Uncle is—but you know him as well as I do."

Titus knew well Ralph Caldoun, the most detested man in his law clientage. Ralph Caldoun considered himself an aristocrat of the old school—a man generous only with himself, with a nose a-tilt for all who labored honestly for a living. Titus had also known Frank Caldoun, Ralph's brother, and had liked him. But Frank had been dead three years.

"It's about Uncle Frank's estate that Uncle Ralph called you," said Blake. There was a gentle quality in his voice when he said, "Uncle Frank." Frank Caldoun had cared for Kenneth Blake, the orphaned son of Mary Caldoun Blake, as he would have cared for a son.

At the thing that now abruptly came before his eyes through the fog, Arthur Titus gasped. It was not because of the gray stone house that suddenly thrust itself upon his vision. It was the girl who

was walking backwards towards them. Her right arm was outthrust; her fingers pointed at nothing! It was as if she moved in a trance.

"Dorothy. . . !" a fearful exclamation sprang from Blake's throat.

THE phantom wires which bound the girl were suddenly broken. She whirled, raced towards her cousin, arms outstretched, her normally beautiful face contorted with terror. Blake caught her, held her close with rough tenderness.

"What in heaven's name is the matter?" Blake's voice was jerky, and his face matched the gray of the mist.

"The hand," she sobbed. "The—the thin, white hand. It reached out and grasped—beckoned me towards—towards—" she shuddered—"towards the tomb."

Titus raised an eyebrow, looked questioningly at Blake. But Blake had eyes only for his cousin.

"There," Blake said, soothingly. "Probably it was only Guarrios, the Portuguese servant. I've told you not to walk around the place alone."

The girl choked. "I know, but the house—the house frightens me. Uncle frightens me. Don't ever leave me, Ken, ever."

The gray door of the house opened. A fat colored woman pushed out onto the veranda. Seeing the frightened girl, she hurried towards them. She took Dorothy in strong, motherly arms, and led her back to the house.

Titus turned to Blake. "What. . . ?" he said.

Kenneth Blake passed his hand over his moist forehead. "I—I think her imagination, the gloom of the place, everything. . . ."

"This tomb," Arthur interrupted. "What did she mean?"

"The family vault or something behind

the house," replied the man. "I'd rather not discuss it, if you don't mind. Morbid. . . ."

Titus told himself that a perfectly normal young woman, such as Dorothy Caldoun appeared to be, was not to be frightened at nothing. However, seeing that Blake was unwilling to press the matter further, Titus questioned him no further. Pausing at the veranda, he suggested: "Suppose you go inform your uncle that I'm here. This rotten weather has fogged my brain. I'll have a pipe to clear my thoughts, outside here in the open air.

Blake complied eagerly with the suggestion. He took himself off into the house with surprising celerity.

Titus had promised himself a pipe. He filled the briar dutifully, lighted it and strolled with apparent carelessness towards the rear of the house.

As gray as the house, twice as gloomy and as silent as the moldering remains it covered, was the Caldoun vault. Its forbidding, wrought-iron door was a rust-eaten red like the yawning maw of some flesh-eating beast.

Then, Titus saw the birds. Small gray sparrows, hopping about near the door. They hurried into the air as he approached, leaving that behind which had attracted their attention. Arthur Titus stooped over and saw two things. The moss-grown flags were sprinkled with tiny white crumbs, and—he looked more closely. Immediately, he forgot about the crumbs. For dotted here and there among them were crimson spots that could only have been blood! And something told him surely that it was human blood. . . .

While his eyes told their unbelievable story, a second sense awakened. He *smelled* something. Something that was all flesh—all corruption.

He turned sharply, fled on unsteady legs towards the house. If life had been

taken, Arthur Titus knew his lips were sealed for the time. He was never a man to speak until he knew what he was saying. He knew nothing now. But he would learn. By heaven, he would learn!

NIGHT was like a great, black hawk that hovered for half an hour above Smoke Island before it dropped for a final, smothering kill. Dim, home-powered electric lamps cast odd shadows and searching beams into the corners of the dark hall. Arthur Titus looked upon the portrait of Frank Caldoun as it hung against the wall of the living room, draped in dusty black crepe. Frank Caldoun, dead three years, yet his face the most cheerful thing in the room.

Tall, angularly jointed was the frame of Ralph Caldoun, present master of Smoke Island. His eyes had the knack of peeping out from beneath shaggy brows so that you were surprised when a ray of light caught them and they gleamed deep into your brain.

"I've had enough of it!" snapped Caldoun now, as he stumped up and down the room swinging his cane as if to batter the brains from anyone who stood in his path. "Money, money, money! All I've heard from those two children is money! I want to make an annuity settlement upon them, Titus, so that they will go away from here and leave me alone."

"But I thought," Arthur Titus ventured, "that Frank Caldoun left both his daughter and his nephew pretty well fixed."

Caldoun spun around. Light caught a huge, ugly cameo scarfpin mounted in his black cravat. "You keep a civil tongue in your head, young man!" he snapped. "I know what's best for 'em. You'll make out the legal papers and be damned to you!"

Titus choked back an angry reply. He walked rapidly around the room, his pipe bubbling furiously, and his attention

focused upon anything that would hold it. Hanging against one black oak panel was a long Spanish knife, its rust-stained point tilted upwards. He stared at it.

"Uh-where did you get this knife?" he asked, more to keep his temper than for any other reason.

"Old family relic," Caldoun spat out. "You know the legend. One Caldoun in every generation dies by the knife."

Titus raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know it," he said evenly. "But why keep the thing around, then? Strong for family legends, aren't you?" He turned savagely towards Caldoun. "I'll be damned if I'll do it!"

"Eh-eh? Do what, you young whipper-snapper?" growled Caldoun.

"Make out your legal papers," replied Titus lightly. "I'm through. You can find another lawyer."

The cheeks of the older man flamed. Oaths coughed from his throat. Then, he caught his anger. His tone became cold as snow.

"Very well," he said. "I hope you've had a pleasant evening at my expense. You may send a radiogram for your boat and leave at once."

Titus stepped close to the man and looked fearlessly into the flashing eyes. "I don't think so," he said, quietly. "When I send a radiogram from this house it will be to the police!"

Caldoun paled. He raised his cane above his head as if he intended to break the lawyer's skull. "You—you. . ." he sputtered, and became speechless.

"Many a skeleton rattles in the Caldoun closet," Titus whispered.

The words had barely left his lips when the door of the study was thrown open. Frightened-faced, Kenneth Blake sprang into the room. "A doctor," he panted. "Quick! Oh, God!" He collapsed in a chair, his thin fingers masking his face.

Titus sprang to Blake's side and, seiz-

ing him by the shoulder, shook him angrily. "What's the matter with you," he snapped.

"Dorothy," Blake murmured. "In the hall . . . the *darned thing* . . ."

The lawyer turned quickly and ran from the room. Slower, stumping along, came Ralph Caldoun.

As soon as he entered the darkened hall, Titus noticed, faintly lingering in the air, the same odor that he had smelled that afternoon by the Caldoun vault. It was the odor of flesh—and corruption! Dorothy was lying limply over the arm of a chair. Her face was milk-white.

"What's the matter with my niece? What's the matter. . . ." A peculiar form of consternation had crept into Ralph Caldoun's tone.

Titus was bending over the girl, chafing her hands. "Fainted," he snapped. "Get me some liquor."

"Guarios!" shouted Caldoun. "Guarios! Damn the man! Where's he gone?"

"Don't stand there bellowing!" Titus barked. "Get some liquor. Are you lame?"

Caldoun's eyes flashed. "Give orders in my house, eh? I'll show—"

He broke off as the fat Negro woman whom Titus had seen earlier in the evening, pushed through the hall door. Her frightened eyes dropped to the still, white form of Dorothy Caldoun.

"Lawdy," she gasped. "What done happen, Mistah Caldoun?"

"Martha, get some wine from the cellar," Caldoun ordered.

The woman's eyes whitened. "Me, sah? Me go down dat cellah? No, sah! Not alone, I won't!"

Titus straightened up. "I'll go, Martha. Caldoun, watch the girl. I'll get the wine. Martha, show me the way."

"Yes, sah," the Negro woman mumbled, bobbing off towards the kitchen. "Ain't no 'lectricity down thah," she explained. She pressed a match on the hot

top of the wood stove and applied its flame to a candle. "Tha's why I don' like goin' down thah, noways. . . ."

TITUS followed her down the moist, stone steps, through a stone archway into a labyrinthian cellar.

"This way to the wine, mistah. . . ."

Then she stopped in her tracks. The candle flame shuddered.

"Lawd!" she moaned. She screamed gutturally, dropped the candle and fled back up the stairs. The lawyer tried to catch at her skirts, but the elliptical darkness made him stumble. He caught his balance. His shaking fingers found a match and struck it. He nursed the tiny flame and held the splinter high above his head.

Then he saw what had brought the scream from Martha. Lying on the floor, a grinning, crimson wound across the throat, was the body of a man!

Titus thought quickly. He knelt, looked long and searchingly into the dead face. The man had features unmistakably Latin. The match flame burned to the lawyer's fingers. He struck another. Yellow flame flashed across the right palm of the corpse. It was stained darkly, a brown-red. Rust, thought Titus, red iron rust. . . .

Titus twisted to his feet and turned towards the stair. Then, he saw that which prickled the hair on the back of his neck. Walking slowly towards him was—but it was unthinkable, unnamable!

It was something that had once been human, but now bore the appearance of a living corpse wrapped in grave clothes. It moved slowly, yet with fearful determination. The face was white almost to the point of phosphorescence . . . the scaly white skin so stretched that every contour of the skull could be clearly seen. It came towards Titus, skeleton hands with cramped, bony fingers outstretched.

And with the specter came the smell of filth and rottenness.

A small scream scraped across Titus' throat. The match burned down, adding the smell of scorched flesh to the odor of corruption. Darkness smothered him. He ducked his head and fled blindly through blackness.

By some miracle, he stumbled up the stone steps. One terrified glance over his shoulder and he scrambled into the kitchen.

He burst into the hall like a madman. The Negro woman was sobbing out her story. Titus, in order to appear unruffled, forced himself to a calm. He did not know all—yet.

"It was dat Dago man, Guarios," the woman sobbed. "Mastah Caldoun, he am as daid as daid. Oh Lawsy, Ah's goin' to leave dis house. Ah's—"

"Stop!" Caldoun ordered. "Where's that idiot of a lawyer?"

"He's right there," Kenneth Blake, who, in the meantime, had managed to revive Dorothy, replied.

Caldoun stared at white-faced Arthur Titus. "You," he laughed, "look as though you've seen a ghost."

"I have!" declared Titus. "And I saw your man, Guarios, on the floor down there. His throat was slashed! Does that coincide with your family legend, Caldoun?"

Caldoun laughed, checked his untimely humor and said, "Guarios was a fine man. Worked well. Asked no questions. . . ."

Titus cut in: "I *will* ask questions. What do you intend to do about it, Caldoun? I suggest a radio message to the police. The sooner proper authorities take charge here the better."

Caldoun's eyes narrowed. He walked slowly, threateningly, towards the lawyer. "You forget I am master here," he said. He allowed steely eyes to glitter through overhanging brows. "Always, men die.

Guarios will be given a decent burial on this island—tonight. Kenneth and you, Titus, will assist."

Dorothy Caldoun tore herself from Kenneth's arms and ran pleading to her uncle. "Uncle Ralph," she cried, "you would never do such a thing! Guarios is entitled to more than decent burial. He is entitled to the vengeance of justice. Whoever or whatever killed him must be found."

"What do you mean by that last statement?" Titus rapped. "Miss Caldoun, what frightened you here in the hall tonight?"

A visible shudder passed over the girl's slender figure. "I—I do not know," she answered. "It was a dead thing. It walked in from the kitchen, and stood looking at me through great, flaming eyes. It did not try to come close to me—only stood there, muttering."

"What did it say?" Titus insisted.

The girl's brow furrowed. "I am not sure, but I think it called me by name. I think it said, 'Dorothy Caldoun, it is yours, all . . .' And I can remember no more."

"Did you notice a peculiar smell?" Titus asked.

"Will you stop pestering her!" Blake snapped. "Don't you see that she is sick?"

"No—no, Kenneth. I **want** to help all I can," said the girl. "Yes, Mr. Titus, there was a smell, a foul smell that seemed to come with it. . . ."

Titus' head snapped up and down. "That's enough," he said. "Step this way, all of you, Caldoun, we'll talk this over sensibly. There are more 'legends' than the one concerning the Spanish knife to be discussed."

HIS decisive manner caused them all—even Caldoun—for the moment to obey him. They walked in hesitant, single file into the black, oak-lined living room

with its dismal hangings and the dangerous Spanish knife that was poised against the paneled wall. Ralph Caldoun swung his lanky frame around so quickly that the light dashed yellow rays from the ugly tiger-eye scarfpin, in a manner that matched the glitter of his eyes. He glared at Blake and stared Dorothy Caldoun out of countenance. But his eyes met sterner stuff when they flashed to Arthur Titus' face.

"Well," Caldoun growled, "a lawyer always asks idiotic questions."

"To begin with," said Titus, "I'd like to know how Dorothy's father, Frank Caldoun, died. The details of his death were hushed up with remarkable speed directly after. Did he, by any chance, die of a very terrible disease?"

A cruel smile flitted across Caldoun's face. "Terrible, indeed! Throat trouble!"

White-faced Kenneth Blake spoke up: "That's a lie! Uncle Frank hanged? If he was, it was stark murder! No finer man—"

"Tut!" Caldoun interrupted sharply. "Who's speaking of hanging?" He pointed mutely to the Spanish knife on the wall.

"Stabbed? Then my father was murdered?" asked Dorothy, hesitantly.

Caldoun leered at his niece, dashed his forefinger across his throat. "From ear to ear!"

Cruel as were his verbal blows, the girl controlled her emotion. Not so with Kenneth Blake. A damning curse tripped from his tongue. He leaped across the room, seized his uncle's throat in his delicate fingers, and did his best to strangle the man.

"Young whelp!" Caldoun snarled. He whirled his cane and brought it down sharply on Blake's shoulders, even before Titus intervened.

Titus pushed his stalky form between the two men. "There'll be neither

throttling nor thrashing tonight," he said, sternly. "Unless I have to do it."

Livid with anger, Caldoun took two steps backward, raised his cane again, measured Titus' frame—then wisely saved the blow.

"Has it occurred to you," said Titus, calmly, "that Guarios died of the same 'throat trouble' that Frank Caldoun was afflicted with?"

"It had not," replied Caldoun, thoughtfully. "But—" he waved the matter aside—"many a Portuguese has died from a knife wound, I'll wager."

"How did the legend of the knife, the curse, or whatever it is, originate?" Titus persisted. "Don't you see, I'm trying to find some explanation for the spectral thing Dorothy saw."

Caldoun shrugged. "I am inclined to quote, 'A bit of underdone potato or a blob of mustard.'"

Titus jerked his head sideways. "No, it won't do. Indigestion affects people differently. I believe Dorothy saw exactly what she claims to have seen."

Blake looked fearfully at the lawyer. "Why?" he asked.

Titus shuddered slightly. "Because," he said slowly, "I saw it, too. It was down there in the basement with the body of Guarios. It was apparently human, but had certain unearthly qualities. A death's-head for a face, skin that glowed with almost phosphorescent light, and carrying with it a stench of flesh too long withheld from the grave!"

Fear, hate and rage combined in a hideous grimace on Caldoun's face. He seized a table for support. There came a flash of blue—and the lights in the house went out!

For a moment the darkness was choking. Then Dorothy screamed. Titus leaped across the room in the direction of the girl. In his attempt to aid her he only startled her the more.

"Take it easy," he reassured her. "A fuse must have blown. Wait, I'll strike a match."

The girl clung tightly to his left arm while he groped for the match he could not find.

"Stand still," he ordered. "I'll go bring a light from the kitchen."

"No—no," the girl pleaded softly. "Don't leave me here. I'm afraid. . . ."

"Blake," Titus snapped.

No answer.

"Blake!" the lawyer repeated sharply. "Either bring a light or watch your cousin while I get one. I say, Blake!"

Still clutching the girl, Titus pivoted. In the hall a flickering wisp of light was moving towards them. "You, Caldoun?" Titus called.

Tensely he watched the nearing candle flame. Then he saw that it was carried neither by Blake nor Caldoun. Fat Martha, the Negro cook shuffled into the room and raised the candle above her bandanna-covered head. Her eyes were a startled white. The candle-stick trembled. A prayer stumbled from her lips. Her shaking brown finger pointed at the carpet.

TITUS turned his head. Involuntarily, he jerked at Dorothy's arm. "Don't turn around," he cautioned. "Martha, take Miss Dorothy out of here at once."

Wide-eyed with terror, the girl stared into Titus' face. "Has something happened?" she breathed.

"I'm afraid so," said Titus. "But I don't know yet just what. . . ." He really meant that he could not tell whether the crooked circle of blood he had seen on the carpet where Martha pointed, flowed from Ralph Caldoun or Kenneth Blake. . . .

He forced Dorothy into the arms of the negress. Taking the candle, he crossed the room to a wall bracket, and lighted a

taper. He returned the candle to the cook and again ordered her to take Dorothy from the room.

Then Titus turned his attention to the gruesome, yellow-lighted scene before him. Ralph Caldoun lay behind the davenport, his long legs making crooked shadows on the floor. The man was moaning softly. Titus hurried to him, but the flickering candle-light failed to reveal any sort of a wound. He shook the tall man by the shoulder. Caldoun opened his eyes and sat up like a man awakening from a deep sleep.

"The knife," Caldoun muttered hoarsely. "Did you see it, Titus? My God! It moved through the air without any means of support, I tell you. The Spanish knife! But for the grace of heaven, the prophesy would have been fulfilled upon my person. Look!"

He pointed a shaking finger high up at the paneled wall. The black oak was beaded with red droplets that were crawling from the newly-crimsoned blade of the Spanish knife. Caldoun clutched Titus' shoulder. "Don't you understand?"

Titus shook his head. "I don't," he said. He was trying to make his voice sound dry.

"No human hand could have taken that knife from the wall. Don't you see that it hangs fully thirteen feet from the floor?"

Suddenly, Titus remembered Blake. Blood on the floor had come from somewhere, from someone. . . .

He left Caldoun sitting on the floor, walked gingerly towards the darkening stain on the carpet. But his eyes shifted suddenly to a crumpled mass of arms and legs dumped behind a chair. It was the body of Kenneth Blake; and in his throat was a grinning, red wound!

Caldoun turned fear-quenched eyes on the body of Kenneth Blake. His lips formed the question, "Who?"

Thoughts burned across Titus' mind. Motive! Ralph Caldoun had motive enough for killing Blake. Frank Caldoun had left money in trust with his brother Ralph to take care of Dorothy and Kenneth Blake. Where wealth was concerned, Ralph Caldoun threw scruples to the winds. Then, another picture formed in Titus' imagination. He could see through the whole scheme now. If his convictions were correct, Ralph Caldoun was the most heartless criminal unhung. He pointed an accusing finger at Caldoun.

"I want to search you," he demanded.

Caldoun paled. "You think that I would kill my own flesh and blood?"

Arthur Titus felt his muscles knotting. "I believe you have committed a crime far worse than murder. Will you put up peaceably with my searching you, or shall I knock you down?"

Caldoun shrugged. "If you must be an ass . . . and the weapon is on the wall above your head. . . ."

"Too far above my head," Titus interrupted. "No human hand could have touched the thing, as you have said."

He approached Caldoun and ran his fingers carefully over the man, turning his pockets inside out and examining the linings of his sleeves. Caldoun watched with frozen contempt in his eyes. He found nothing.

Titus stood back, letting his eyes wander about the room. The floor was carpeted to the wall. Three scatter rugs offered the only place of possible concealment beside the drawers of the table. He went first to the table and examined it. No hidden knife. Then he ripped back the three rugs. Still no knife—but something else. Wires leading to the table lamp had been scraped bare of insulation. The exposed metal was blackened by the heat of the short circuit. The lights had not gone out by accident. A heel-plate on somebody's shoe would have put the

whole system out of order in a second.

Titus shoved the table over to the wall beneath the suspended Spanish knife. From the top of the table, he could see a cavity in the handle from which the "blood" had been permitted to flow. The knife was supported on a pivot. He remembered that when he first saw it, its tip had pointed ceiling-ward. Someone could have touched the knife with something long—say a cane—tilted it in the opposite direction, and the red fluid would have coursed down its edge.

He got down from the table, wondering, as he did so, if his case would stand in court. He doubted it. There was no weapon and—

His thoughts broke off abruptly at a choked gasp from Caldoun. Titus swung around on the balls of his feet. All meditated action seeped from his nerves and left his muscles limp. The wide casement windows had been flung back as if by an invisible hand! Damp night air wafted in gray mist, the smell of dripping foliage and—the *stench of death*.

THE figure that stepped through the window was tall. Ragged clothes were earth-stained. Scaly fingers, death-whitened, dangled from ripped sleeves. The face was white. Scabrous skin stretched so tightly that the features were like those of a death's-head. Eyes gleamed redly from two dark pits.

Caldoun's hands checked a scream in his throat. The livid lips of the living corpse parted in a skull's grin, displaying ragged teeth and receding gums. A voice groaned from a hollow breast: "Embrace me, brother. . . ."

Caldoun was riveted to the spot. And Titus could understand the man's terror, for he could move no more than Caldoun. Titus watched the spectral figure advance, saw the skeleton fingers crooking at Caldoun's throat. Caldoun backed

towards the wall, his movements jerky and mechanical. The moisture of fear beaded upon his forehead.

The phantom lunged forward. Sharp, bony fingers imbedded themselves in Caldoun's neck. Caldoun's cry gurgled in his throat. Then, Titus saw the knife!

Caldoun's right hand stabbed out, drove upward, and caught at the cameo in his tie. A ten-inch knife of razor steel flashed from the lining of Caldoun's tie.

Twice, the knife hacked out. Blood spurted along the almost transparent skin of the cadaverous creature. The bony talons straightened. The creature staggered backwards, clutching at its throat.

Titus threw himself towards the bleeding thing. Again, came the hollow voice:

"Stand back. I have . . . robbed the grave . . . too long. . . . Stand back . . . back. I am . . . unclean. . . ."

The tall figure in grave clothes swayed slightly and toppled backwards.

Titus whirled around. The bloody knife had slipped from Caldoun's hand. He had dropped into a chair and the whole of his lank body was quivering.

Titus' nerves were cold, his body calm.

"I hope," he said earnestly, "that you will suffer the same tortures that you brought upon your brother."

Titus pointed to the corpse-faced thing on the floor. "Deny that *that* is your brother," he snapped. "I suspected as much when I saw birds eating bread crumbs scattered around the door of the vault. You had kept your brother Frank a living corpse among the dead. You fed him yourself, poking food through the door of the vault.

"Then, Guarios discovered your secret. Rust stains on his hand lead me to believe that he liberated your brother from the tomb. So you killed Guarios. To the world, Frank Caldoun was dead. You controlled his wealth. But you knew that

if Kenneth Blake and Dorothy Caldoun ever claimed what was theirs by rights, you would be penniless. So you brought them here to kill them—brought me as a witness that their death had come about by supernatural means.

"When you had put the lights out, you smothered Blake's mouth with one hand and slit his throat with the knife in your tie. You had rigged up the knife on the wall and the story about the curse in the family, in order to frighten me into believing that death had come to Blake and Guarios through supernatural means. But why didn't you, a born Cain, kill your brother long ago?"

"I—I hated him," Caldoun stuttered, all resistance gone. "He made so much money, and all that I had he had given me. It was charity. It—it hurt. He was taken sick when we were in the Orient. I bribed a doctor to write a death certificate and smuggled Frank back on a tramp steamer."

"Then," Titus interrupted, "you brought him to this island, forced him to live in the tomb so that you might watch him rot away. God! What a death!"

Titus looked shudderingly at the body of Frank Caldoun. "The living death," he breathed. "Leprosy. I should have known by the odor of decay and the white, rotting skin. . . ."

MORNING, and a low, black police launch was moored off Smoke Island. Cloaked like ghosts, medical men carried three stiff, sheeted forms to the boat. Handcuffed, his spirit quenched of fire, Ralph Caldoun stepped to the launch.

And as he did so, a warm tropic breeze sprang out of the south. Fog and morning mist swept aside. As if an evil spirit, long pervading the island, had been removed, Smoke Island appeared as a sparkling emerald floating in a sea of lapis lazuli.