

« « « GRIPPING TALES IN EVERY ISSUE » » »

# Strange STORIES

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CONTENTS

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## THE SEAL OF SIN

*A Complete Novelet of Evil Powers*

By HENRY KUTTNER

*Both Blessed and Cursed is the Hand that Wears the Ancient Seal of Solomon, Until a Twisted Soul is Drawn into Its Sinister Bondage and Reaps a Ghastly Harvest . . . . .*

14

|  |                          |    |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| <b>THE DEAD KNOW ALL</b>   | <b>Norman A. Daniels</b> |    |
| <i>A Would-be Murderer Meets His Nemesis! . . . . .</i>  |                          | 31 |
| <b>THE HOUSE OF STANLEY</b>  | <b>George J. Rawlins</b> |    |
| <i>A Knight in Armor Rides from the Past to Preserve His Noble Name . . .</i>  |                          | 37 |
| <b>THE TAPESTRY GATE</b>   | <b>Leigh Brackett</b>    |    |
| <i>Mortal Greed Was the Force that Drew Souls into the Devil's Cloth . . .</i>   |                          | 46 |
| <b>SATAN'S SIDESHOW</b>  | <b>Carson Judson</b>     |    |
| <i>Between Two Men Joined by a Strange Law of God Comes a Flame of Searing Hate to Rip the Bonds—and Wreak Vengeance! [A Complete Novelet]</i> |                          | 54 |
| <b>BIRKETT'S TWELFTH CORPSE</b>  | <b>August W. Derleth</b> |    |
| <i>Darkly Swirling Waters Covered All that Remained of a Hideous Secret . .</i>  |                          | 67 |
| <b>I AM GOING TO CRACOW!</b>   | <b>Maria Moravsky</b>    |    |
| <i>A Swamp Witch Shows Jacob Wolski the Road to His Heart's Desire . . .</i>   |                          | 70 |
| <b>THE DEAD SHALL RISE UP</b>  | <b>Will Garth</b>        |    |
| <i>A Prophecy Defeats a Merciless Ghoul . . . . .</i>  |                          | 79 |
| <b>DESIGN FOR DOOM</b>   | <b>Eli Colter</b>        |    |
| <i>An Ancient Bronze Tool Evokes Weird Visions of Violence . . . . .</i>   |                          | 81 |
| <b>THE BLACK ARTS (A Department)</b>   | <b>Lucifer</b>           |    |
| <i>Join THE BLACK ARTS CLUB—Coupon on Page 96 . . . . .</i>  |                          | 90 |

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# The Seal of Sin

A Complete Novelet of Evil Powers

By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Cursed Be the City," "The Citadel of Darkness," etc.

## CHAPTER I

### Power

**I**T IS often difficult to trace human wickedness to its source. Jewel Worth was, perhaps, one of the most evil creatures that ever existed on earth. But it was not until her twenty-fifth year that this evil was so horribly manifested.

As a young girl, Jewel was apparently normal in every way. With her

younger sister, Kay, she attended private schools and eventually college, while her father, who was an archeologist, hunted his dreary treasures in Tibet, Africa, and the Rubh el Khali of Arabia. The girls were motherless. When they graduated from college, Dr. Arthur Worth retired from active service and bought an estate in the Berkshire hills, where he lived with his daughters and a few servants.

In that sunny, pleasant estate, the

Jewel lifted her hand. The light coalesced into a single blazing ray





*Both Blessed and Cursed Is the Hand That  
Wears the Ancient Seal of Solomon, Until  
a Twisted Soul Is Drawn into Its Sinister  
Bondage—and Reaps a Ghastly Harvest!*

sin of Jewel Worth grew and was nurtured seemingly from nothing until it burst into a poisonous and terrible flower. Michael Castile may have been to blame—certainly he was weak in acceding to Jewel's demands—though he could have had no idea of the possible consequences. But, of course, Castile was desperately, hopelessly in love with Jewel. From the moment he realized that love he was doomed.

A flower that grew from nothing? It is scarcely credible. Somewhere, deep within Jewel, there was a chemical or psychic seed of evil that waited, dormant, for the right environment to quicken it. Jewel and Kay were half-sisters; the mothers of both were dead. Kay's mother, perhaps, might be held responsible for the ultimate sin, though she was merely the instrument of an unchangeable law—the Mendelian law of heredity.

We know little, as yet, of the characteristics that may be transmitted through the generations by the genes and chromosomes of human beings. And we know little of the real truth behind the ancient lore of demonolatry which we casually dismiss as superstition. The line of Jewel Worth was tainted.

During the Salem mania an ancestor of hers had been tried for witchcraft. In the Scottish witch-baiting days another ancestor had been burned to ashes at the stake, accused of casting spells and possessing strange powers. In the family were seers, fortune-tellers, and occultists. Through the gloomy, dark halls of centuries the girl's forebears had come, carrying an ancestral curse which waited, latent, in Jewel until she realized her power.

**S**HE missed being lovely by a hair's-breadth. Her hair was not quite fine enough; its red-gold was dull and tarnished rather than glowingly brilliant. Her pale, patrician face was a bit too thin and her blue eyes were somewhat shallow. She was tall, but angular rather than graceful. Her half-sister, Kay, was not lovely either, but she was undeniably pretty—a small, soft, friendly girl with brown eyes and hair, and extremely tiny feet.

There was little rivalry between the

two girls. If Jewel ever beguiled one of Kay's admirers, Kay didn't mind. But Tommy Hazard was a man Jewel couldn't beguile, and in time a deep and real love began to exist between Kay and Hazard. Oddly enough, Hazard, the only man Jewel couldn't get, was the one she wanted. At first she was piqued, finally, angry. And ultimately she loved her half-sister's suitor with a hopeless passion.

Michael Castile provided the catalyst. He was a small, slim, dark-haired man in his early thirties, an odd mixture of Irish, Spanish, and Moorish blood. He had known Dr. Worth and corresponded with him for years. He also lived in the Berkshires not far away. Castile's interest in archeology was intense but eccentric. His main study was anthropology. His library contained innumerable works on sorcery and the black arts.

"The study of psychology includes abnormality," he observed once to Dr. Worth, as the old man and his daughters were leaving his home one evening. "Abnormal anthropology is equally important. Demonology, magic, goety, they all help to throw light on dead centuries. One can't understand people without knowing both sides of their characters."

"I fail to see how superstition can affect trends so deeply," Dr. Worth grunted, his strong, tanned old face scarcely wrinkled by his sixty years of service. "Some research is necessary, yes. But you've practically exhausted your subject."

"Oh, no." Castile grinned, white teeth flashing. "The subject can't be exhausted. You don't realize what a tremendous field magic is, or the scope of its ramifications. There are so many things—from calling up the devil to hanging a sieve outside your door to keep witches away."

"I still feel you're neglecting more important subjects by concentrating on superstition."

"Magic, or belief in it, has changed the world. Why, back in pre-historic times the witch-doctors and *shamans* got power and set up a class that has persisted to modern times. In Sumeria, the oldest civilization, the magic-makers were feared and respected. In

Egypt the priests of evil were as powerful, almost, as the priests of Amon-Ra. Even in the middle ages a friendless, starving, wretched old woman could get what she wanted by pretending to be a witch. Of course she ran the danger of being burned alive, but many took the chance. The history of magic is the history of power, Dr. Worth."

The archeologist grunted, unconvinced, and bade his host good night. Jewel lingered in the library with Castile. She was examining a book she had pulled from the shelves—*The Philosophy of Witchcraft*.

Castile touched her arm.

"Time to go, kid," he said. "Take the book along if you want to read it."

She looked up at the man, her blue eyes glowing.

"I'd like to, Mike," she said. "I hadn't realized what a fascinating subject this is. You must have a tremendous lot of books on it."

"Sure. And some of them were plenty expensive. Original manuscripts, vellum and parchment, old instruments of sorcery, divining rods and so on. I've plenty of stuff here you can't find in any library."

**J**EWEL'S red lips were slightly parted. "May I come here sometimes and do some reading?" she asked. "I'd like to study the—history of magic, Mike. It'd be interesting, and I've so much spare time."

"Sure. Any day. Be glad to—" Castile's dark face was expressionless. "Jewel!" It was her father's voice, summoning.

"Thanks a lot. I'll take you up on it." The girl reached out and squeezed Castile's arm gently.

She went out, listening to a refrain that ran like a drumbeat through her mind—"The history of magic is the history of power—power—power!"

Something deep within Jewel Worth had quickened to life that night and was stirring restlessly, in the throes of psychic birth. As a scrap of iron is drawn relentlessly toward a lodestone, so the dark lore drew the daughter in whose veins ran the blood of witch mothers. It was not merely casual curiosity. Nothing on earth

could have kept Jewel away from Michael Castile's library the next day.

She read and studied avidly. Castile would sometimes halt in his work and come to the door to watch her, while a slow, inevitable pulse of passion grew within him. He fought it down, coldly reasoning with himself. A youngster like Jewel wouldn't be willing to marry a dull, dry-as-dust anthropologist. She was too youthful, too vibrantly alive. She needed someone nearer her own age. Someone who could be a companion, take her to dances, give her gayety and laughter.

And yet, Castile thought, I am only thirty-two. I can change my life. I can pattern my life to suit her desires—

He never spoke of his love. But through the long summer days and nights he spent more time with Jewel, helping her, instructing her, as she studied the history and practice of magic. It was the latter which interested her more. Castile was an authority, and gave Jewel considerable information. He showed her ancient, secret spells written on weathered, discolored vellum, pentagrams emblazoned with cabalistic signs, sounds and scents and other things supposed to break the veil between this world and others.

Carried away by his interest, he spoke sometimes with passionate belief, and then, coming back to sanity, he would chuckle at his own intensity and dismiss the subject with half-mocking amusement.

But Jewel never laughed. Though her lips would curve sympathetically, deep inside her was something cold and deadly and burningly strong that drove her deeper into her studies. The seed within the girl was germinating. A force long dormant was wakening, slowly, inevitably, and at times Jewel felt that the diagrams and spells she was reading for the first time were oddly and inexplicably familiar.

An ancestral memory, perhaps, made her progress astonishingly swift. A scientist might say that a recessive characteristic in the girl was becoming dominant through action of a catalyst.

But Jewel was restless and unhappy.

While Dr. Worth was not wealthy, he loved his daughters and tried to gratify their whims, readily sacrificing his own comfort when necessary. He gave parties and dances which he could ill afford, encouraged the girls' friends to visit, and gave them allowances as large as he could. But Jewel was not satisfied. The peaceful, quiet life of the Berkshires did not please her. She preferred the turmoil of New York.

"I'm sorry, Jewel," Dr. Worth told her in response to her pleas. "I can't afford to pull up stakes. Besides, Kay's happy here—it wouldn't be fair to her. She's engaged to Tommy Hazard now, and that's about all she wants. My investments have been going badly lately, too. If you really want to go to New York, I'll increase your allowance as much as I can, but I'm afraid it won't be enough. You'd have to get a job to get along. I can arrange that if you want. The work won't be hard."

"I won't live on a shoestring," Jewel flashed, "and I certainly won't work. Why should I?" She became thoughtful. "Mike has money. Maybe—"

"Certainly not!" her father snapped. "You mustn't ask him—or have you?"

"No. But—"

"Try and get along a while longer." Dr. Worth's bronzed face grew softer. He put his arm about his daughter, pulling her close. She pulled away impatiently. "I'll do what I can, Jewel. Maybe I can do something with my investments. In a few months perhaps I can send you to New York with enough money to live fairly well."

"All right." The girl frowned and turned to the door. "But it isn't fair. I can tell you that." She went out.

Dr. Worth relaxed in his chair, frowning. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. Matters were worse than he had told Jewel. The investments were in bad shape. But perhaps he could do something, give the girl what she wanted. . . .

And Jewel Worth drove her roadster toward Michael Castile's home. Her face was expressionless, but in her eyes was a blue flame, and in her brain a voice thundered:

"The history of magic is the history of power—magic is power—power!"

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## CHAPTER II

### *The Signet*

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**I**T WAS now six months since Jewel first began her study of sorcery. Since that time she had imperceptibly changed, not outwardly, but new traits had developed in her character. They were as yet latent, but ready to mould her actions when necessary. And three things contributed to her unhappiness.

First, lack of money, forcing her to live a life she detested. In New York she pictured herself as a mysterious glamorous figure, with a good part of the world at her feet. Far different from the dreary Berkshire routine.

Second, there was Tommy Hazard. Jewel knew, now, that she was passionately in love with the man. He had given her no encouragement, being completely wrapped up in Kay. And Jewel's experimental advances had been so much wasted effort. So the girl's love for Hazard inevitably caused in her heart a corresponding hatred for Kay.

And finally, Michael Castile. He could no longer disguise what he felt for Jewel. He loved her, and said so. She dared not refuse him point-blank, since she needed him in her research. While she consented to their engagement, she insisted that it be kept a secret for a time. Unwillingly Castile agreed, tortured and miserable by Jewel's caprices.

He came to meet the girl at the door, his face eager, hands outstretched. She submitted passively to his kiss.

"What's wrong, darling?" he asked. "Is something the matter?"

Jewel nodded.

"Come into the library," she said. "I want to talk to you, Mike."

Castile followed her, lit a cigarette, and set out a decanter of old Oloroso sherry.

"Drink?" he offered.

"Yes, thanks. Will you answer a question honestly?"

"Of course."

"Father has a certain ring he keeps

in the safe." Jewel looked steadfastly at the man. "I've seen it. What—"

Castile stood motionless, and suddenly the wine-glass stem snapped in his hand. Silently he took out a handkerchief and wrapped it about his bleeding fingers. Only then did he speak.

"You've seen it? How?"

Jewel hesitated. She knew the safe combination, of course, but the ring had been in a locked jewel-case which a surreptitiously-procured skeleton key had opened for her. It wouldn't do to mention that.

"Father was careless. He had it out."

"He has never had it out of its case since he showed it to me and I confirmed his suspicions," Castile said coldly.

The girl rose suddenly, setting down her glass, and came toward Castile. She stood very close to him, the fragrance of her perfume strong in his nostrils. Her nearness was intoxicating. Castile made as though to turn away.

Jewel put her arms about his neck and waited. The result was inevitable. When the long kiss was over, Jewel knew the battle was half won. Castile would talk.

**E**VENTUALLY, he did.

"The ring was smuggled out of Arabia—I won't say by whom," he began. "It was purchased from a nomad chief in the Rubh el Khali, the great desert there. The Khali's a waste now, a wilderness, but there were cities once upon a time. Old cities. Places older than history, Jewel. The ages lie sleeping there, and from those forgotten ages have come legends."

"The legend of Suleiman—"

"The legend of Suleiman ben Daoud, Solomon of Ophir, Lord of the Genii, whom God made the wisest of all men. Yes."

"Solomon had power over all living things—living or dead," Jewel said softly. "He ruled demons and afrits through virtue of a certain signet?"

"The Seal of Solomon. Yes, the ring in your father's safe is the Seal of Solomon, Jewel. He suspected it, and showed it to me. I knew at once. I advised him to keep it hidden forever,

or else to destroy it. You've studied the history of magic, but there are some things I have never told you. I've come to believe that sorcery is something more than a legend. Beyond the charlatanry and faking there are certain basic laws which are more than normal. Magic has existed in the past, that I know. Whether it exists today—" Castile shrugged. "I have Moorish blood. And there were Moorish sorcerers in Spain once, in the Alhambra. I'm more ready to believe than the average man, perhaps. But I *know* there are things beyond life which are subject to little-known laws of sorcery and magic."

If Castile saw the blazing fire in Jewel's eyes, he ignored it.

"The Seal of Solomon did not originate on earth," he went on. "It came from—elsewhere. And an adept may use the power of the signet, releasing its potential powers in ways which we call supernatural. The Seal may bless or curse, depending on how it is used. It has the faculty of changing men to beasts, to bring absolute power and protection to its wearer. Its secrets are—but you must forget all this, Jewel. I shall speak to your father today."

The girl's lashes lowered.

"You haven't played fair with me, Mike," she said, irrelevantly.

"What?" He was caught by surprise.

Suddenly Jewel swung about and pointed to a closet in the corner.

"You never showed me that part of your library," she said, triumphantly.

"Jewel!" Castile's dark face went white under the swarthy skin. "You've not been in there?"

"No."

"Then how—"

"Marginal notes in other books. References to certain volumes and charts. There's part of your library I haven't seen, isn't there?"

"A part you'll never see. You can't play around with magic. There are things in that closet that would upset the science of this century. It's evil, Jewel, and when I die, all this stuff will be destroyed. A loss to science, perhaps, and to research, but a blessing to humanity. You've only seen

superficial spells and formulae. There are—others. There are keys that unlock the gates of hell itself."

"Is there a formula for using the Seal?"

"No," Castile said, too swiftly. "There is none."

"Mike, I think you take all this too seriously," Jewel smiled disarmingly. "You need a rest. When we're married, I'll see that you spend little time in this library." He failed to catch the ominous meaning behind the words.

**N**EVERTHELESS, Castile was still suspicious.

"I think you'd better go now," he said. "I'll drive you home. I want to see your father."

"Don't be rude, Mike. You can at least give me another drink before I go."

Castile unwrapped the handkerchief from his fingers. The bleeding had stopped. He poured more sherry. Jewel sipped and made a wry face.

"Got any bitters?"

"Of course." He went to the sideboard. The girl moved swiftly. From her handbag she took a tiny pellet and dropped it in Castile's glass, where it immediately dissolved.

This sleeping potion was the first fruit of her research. It was powerful, so much so that within a minute after sipping the wine Castile was slumped in his chair, inert and motionless.

Jewel rose with pantherlike agility. She went to the door, locked it, and returned to search the sleeping man. Armed with his key-ring, she went to the closet and tried key after key in the lock. Finally one fitted—she swung open the door.

The closet was small, lined with shelves that were littered with books, scrolls and papers. Jewel switched on an electric bulb overhead and hurriedly began to examine the conglomeration. Luckily, she knew what to look for. But it was nearly an hour before she found the musty vellum roll covered with Latin inscriptions, and headed by the phrase, "*Via trita, via tuta.*"

Twilight deepened and hung purple shadows over the Berkshires. Still Jewel pondered over the scroll. It did

not reveal all the power of the Seal, but it revealed enough. The secret of will, and of suggestion. A hypnotized man, if touched with a bit of ice and told that it is red-hot metal, will develop a blister on his skin at that point. And the Seal was a far stronger catalyst, drawing its power from the cosmic and unknown gulfs beyond our universe. A man, told that he is a beast—a lycanthrope—a werewolf...

The full moon rose over the eastern mountain rim. Castile awoke suddenly as the strength of the sleeping potion wore off. For a second he remained quiet in his chair, his eyes intent on the open door of the closet.

Then, cursing, he sprang up and rushed forward. Roughly he seized Jewel, tore the scroll from her hand, and dragged her out, locking the closet door in fumbling haste. He switched on a lamp, and, in its wan radiance, stood staring at the girl.

"What have you done?" he asked hoarsely.

She shrugged, smiling enigmatically.

"I'm taking you to your father now," Castile said. "Come along!"

He gripped the girl's arm. She pulled free, leaped away, and with a quick motion switched off the lamp. Moonlight filtered vaguely through the windows, dusting the rows of books with yellow dimness.

Before Castile could move Jewel slipped something on the middle finger of her left hand. Instantly, fierce, blazing light flamed through the room—cold, unearthly.

It came from a ring, the stone of which was carved with archaic, strange symbols.

"The Seal—" Castile whispered.

In the blinding light Jewel's face was transfigured. She seemed like a goddess, her eyes lambent with blue electric radiance. No longer was the red-gold hair dull and tarnished, no longer did she seem thin and angular. Even under the stress of his horror and emotion Castile caught his breath at sight of the girl's new, incredible loveliness.

She lifted her hand. The light coalesced into a single ray. It shot out and struck Castile's forehead, seeming



to sink deep, deep! He gave a single cry and stood motionless, frozen.

"You are not taking me to my father, Michael Castile," the girl said. "You are going to him alone. And—in other form!"

The light flared up. Almost visible waves of thought and will seemed to leap from Jewel's eyes. Abruptly flame bathed the body of Castile, shrouding him from view.

The white fires sank down. They vanished. Where Castile had stood was now no human figure.

In the shadows something slunk forward, a shaggy, half-seen form that growled deep in its throat.

Jewel went to the window and flung it open. She stepped aside.

"Go to my father!" she commanded. "And *kill!*"

The thing in the room made a swift leap. For a second the silhouette of a huge wolf loomed against the moonlight. Then it was gone. The padding of its racing feet died into silence.

But in the brain of Jewel Worth an insistent rhythm beat stronger and stronger. She stood staring out into the vast abyss of the sky, listening to a voice that cried in mad exultation: "Power—power—power!"

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### CHAPTER III

#### *The Plan*

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**T**HE death of Dr. Arthur Worth caused a small turmoil in the Berkshire country. He was found in his bedroom, a ruined corpse, with his throat torn completely out. There were wolf-tracks outside the window. Posses were organized; for days men beat the woods in search of a savage beast who could not be found.

Michael Castile could do nothing. The hypnotic powers of the signet had sealed his lips at Jewel's command. The betraying words could not form themselves on his tongue, no matter how hard he might try to confess. Even from a distance Jewel could control the man, as long as she wore the ring. And it never left her

finger now, day or night. She assumed command of the household. Kay was prostrated with grief, although Tommy Hazard remained with her as much as possible. Jewel ignored him. She could afford to wait, now, till her preparations were made.

**T**HERE was now nothing to fear from her father. Jewel had another motive in engineering his death—he had carried large insurance premiums. But Jewel soon discovered that he had allowed them to lapse. She hid her baffled fury well, and changed the nature of her schemes. First, she liquidated what was left of the estate, realized a small cash sum.

Michael Castile had money, but was not wealthy. Jewel decided to go to New York. Kay, however, was adamant in refusing, and the upshot was a flood of angry words and, on Kay's part, tears. Jewel solved the problem by going to New York with her share of the money, leaving her half-sister to shift for herself.

With her Jewel took Castile. Not yet assured of the scope of her power, she dared not leave him alone in the Berkshires. But she soon found that there was nothing to fear. The Seal of Solomon was potent beyond anything she had imagined. And, of course, Castile's lips were sealed.

Jewel considered and reconsidered. She was still deeply infatuated with Tommy Hazard, but was not anxious to win him immediately. Hazard's fortune was not sufficient for her desires. She could wait, confident that the Seal would bring to her the man she loved whenever she wished.

Meanwhile there was much to do. She spent her small hoard recklessly, drawing on Castile when it was depleted, buying gowns, perfumes, and even jewels. She plunged into a social whirl, considering it an investment, a means of finding the right fish to hook. And, in due time, at a fashionable café, she met Stephen Bruner.

Bruner was an oil millionaire, a widower in his late fifties, but still hale and hearty. His fortune was large enough even for Jewel's exacting requirements.

The café was crowded. Castile,

appearing dark and sullen in his full-dress, sat across the table from Jewel, playing with his glass. Lately he had taken to drinking heavily, and he was more than half-drunk now. He looked up when the girl spoke to him.

"Mike, do you see that man?" she said. "Over at the big table?"

"I see him. Well?"

"Stephen Bruner, isn't he? I've seen his picture—"

"What are you up to?" Castile's face twitched.

Jewel did not answer. She glanced at the ring on her finger and then turned to gaze at Bruner. Her eyes took on a lambent, compelling glow. The Seal of Solomon was suddenly luminous—

As though drawn by a magnet, Bruner swung around. His stare met Jewel's. Some silent, strange greeting flared in that look, and then abruptly Bruner had thrust back his chair and was coming forward. He halted to speak briefly with the head waiter, who was supposed to know everyone who was anyone.

Introductions were made. Bruner immediately deserted his party to sit with Jewel, to her intense pleasure. Castile continued to sit glumly in his place, drinking double brandies in swift succession.

"It's odd we've never met," Bruner said. "Have you been in New York long?"

"No. Less than a month. I'm trying to see everything at once."

"Well—" Bruner hesitated. "I'm going down to Hatteras in my yacht over the week-end. A small party. I wonder—"

"It's scarcely conventional, is it?" Jewel asked, laughing. "However, if Mr. Castile is included in the invitation—"

"I don't believe I care to go," Castile broke in on Bruner's hasty acquiescence. "Miss Worth will feel much freer without me."

There was a brief pause. Jewel put her hand on the table—the signet gleamed eerily in the bright light.

"Mr. Castile forgets his manners, I'm afraid. You'll excuse him—"

The girl's blue gaze sought Castile's and a menacing glow burned in their

depths. The man moved uneasily in his chair.

"Sorry. Of course I'll be glad to accept."

"Good!" Bruner's heavy face beamed with pleasure. "I'm sure you'll enjoy yourselves. We'll—eh?" He paused as a blond, pink-skinned youth came up beside him. The young man looked rather like a rabbit, with his buck teeth and receding chin.

"My son, Jack," Bruner introduced the newcomer, with little grace. "Miss Worth, Mr. Castile."

"Glad to know you," Jack said, and sat down without invitation. He took a monogrammed silver case from his pocket, offered the others cigarettes, and lit one for himself. Then he sat back, the white cylinder drooping from one corner of his slack mouth. His small, bright eyes were fixed intently on Jewel, who was conscious of the scrutiny. In that silent stare the girl read dislike.

And, in the days that followed, the dislike deepened. Jewel could read the motive. Bruner was infatuated with the girl, and made no secret of it. His son, who had looked forward for years to the prospect of the inheritance of millions, grew restive and worried. But the power of the signet held Stephen Bruner inexorably.

Three months later Bruner and Jewel were married. The girl twisted the knife in Castile's wound by insisting that he be best man. Jack failed to attend the wedding, to his father's outspoken anger.

"He's a bit jealous, Steve," Jewel said as the guests were departing. "Give him time. He'll come around. Don't do anything you'd regret later."

"I'd like to disinherit the damn pup," Bruner sputtered. "If I hadn't promised his mother—"

**THAT**, of course, was the difficulty.

Bruner had made a new will, dividing his estate equally between his wife and son. Jewel waited, biding her time.

The newly-wedded couple lived in Bruner's New York mansion, from which Jack had indignantly taken his departure. Castile, at Jewel's order, maintained an apartment uptown. She

visited him there occasionally, chiefly to reassure herself that the power of the ring was not failing.

One day a telephone call from Castile summoned the girl to his apartment. He greeted her with an unusual touch of ironic triumph and gave her a telegram to read.

"They've been married," he said, smiling. "Tommy Hazard and Kay. Last night, I've already wired them congratulations."

Jewel shivered uncontrollably. Her face went paper-white, a dead pale mask in which only the electric blue eyes seemed alive. Even her lips were suddenly gray.

She turned her gaze on Castile, and the man evaded the deadly look. But slowly, inexorably, his head turned till he stared at the motionless girl. She said nothing, but on her finger the Seal waxed and waned with pale radiance.

"No." Castile whispered. "No—don't, Jewel!"

He stepped back a pace. Stiffly, like an automaton, he turned and walked across the room toward the window. He opened it.

Twenty stories below Fifth Avenue sent up a droning hum of noisy traffic.

Castile put one leg over the sill. His face was twisted and utterly horrible with stark fear.

Then he paused. The two figures remained unmoving for a dozen heartbeats.

Suddenly Jewel relaxed. Her shoulders sagged; she went to the sideboard and poured a stiff peg of brandy for herself, and a stiffer one for Castile. He had drawn back from the window now and had dropped into a chair, where he sat shaking, head in hands.

"Drink this," the girl commanded, and Castile obeyed. The trembling that racked him passed. He lay back, silent. Jewel watched him broodingly.

"You were very near to death then, Mike," she said. "Very near."

"I wish to God you'd made me jump," Castile burst out. "It'd be over then, anyway."

"You don't really wish that. You're afraid of death. Well, so am I. It's

natural enough." She finished the brandy. "So Kay's married. To Tommy. I waited too long."

Castile watched her curiously.

"You love him, don't you?" he said. "I wonder if you really can love anyone."

Jewel scarcely heard him.

"I'm through waiting," she said, decisively. "Mike, telephone Jack Bruner. Ask him to come up here as soon as he can."

"Why?"

"I told you—I'm finished with waiting," the girl said gently. "Now I shall act!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *Fangs of the Wolf*

**A**N HOUR later Jack Bruner entered the apartment. His weak face was sullen. Quite obviously he had been drinking heavily. When he saw Jewel his face became wry and he turned, as though to leave.

"Wait," the girl said. "Don't go, Jack. I want to talk to you."

"Well?" He hesitated.

"Why do you hate me so much?"

Jack grinned crookedly. He lit a cigarette, glanced at the sideboard, and lifted his eyebrows enquiringly. Castile got up to fix a drink.

"Hate you? I don't think I do, you know. You're very charming, quite pretty—but I think you're a gold-digger."

"You think your father doesn't love me?"

"Love? Nuts." Jack gulped his brandy. "He's been in love with my mother's memories for years. He's changed completely in the last month or so. Never speaks of Mother—he's forgotten her utterly. That doesn't quite jibe with my father as I've known him. You've changed Dad, Jewel, haven't you?"

"Jack," the girl said in a different voice, "look at this."

"Eh? What—"

The Seal of Solomon burned balefully against a slim white hand. **Tiny**

lightnings seemed to gather about it. The glow brightened—brightened—

"What the devil are you doing? I don't—"

Jack thrust back his chair and stood up angrily. He made a motion to set down his glass, but did not complete it. Instead he froze, motionless, glaring at the fires of the signet.

The glass slipped from his fingers, shattered on the carpet.

"Jewel!" Castile whispered. "For the love of God—"

"Be silent," she said. Then she spoke to Jack. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," he responded dully.

"You will obey my commands."

"I will obey your commands."

"Tonight, at midnight, you will call at your father's house and see him alone in his study."

"Tonight, at midnight—"

\* \* \* \* \*

As the clocks chimed twelve the doorbell rang. Jewel, preparing for bed, listened intently. She heard voices in the hall, and, presently, the heavy footsteps of her husband sounded on the stairs. She waited for a time, until the servants had retreated, and then followed Stephen Bruner.

She paused at the library door. Voices came from beyond it—Stephen's peremptory, puzzled, and Jack's, confused and stammering. Silently Jewel opened the door a crack.

Through the gap she saw the bulky figure of her husband standing beside his desk, facing Jack. The latter seemed intoxicated almost to the point of irrationality. His face was covered with perspiration, and he was swaying on his feet.

"Why the devil do you get me out of bed at this hour?" Bruner was demanding. "If you want to apologize for the way you've acted, say so."

Jack passed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"I—I don't know, Dad. I'm sick, I think—" he stammered, weakly.

**B**RUNER'S massive face softened. He gripped his son's arm.

"You come along. I'll put you to bed, boy. You need sleep—"

Jewel pushed the door open a bit further. She lifted the Seal of Solomon. The magic signet was alight, flaming hotly with curdled fires of radiance.

From the ring the fires leaped. A shining ray darted across the room and struck Jack Bruner's forehead. It sank in deep, avidly.

Jewel's lips moved silently. A shroud of flame hid the boy.

"Jack!" The older man was stumbling back, his face contorted. "Jack!"

Swiftly Jewel reached through the doorway and snapped off the light. The dim glow of street lamps filtered through the windows. They revealed a hulking, black form that moved swiftly and purposefully through the gloom.

A low snarling came to Jewel's ears. She closed the door and leaned against it, her eyes closed. Other sounds came—

When the servants answered the high-pitched, agonized shrieking, Jewel was running down the stairs toward the library. She followed the butler as he burst into the room.

"Mr. Bruner!" he called. "What—"

Jewel fumbled for the light-switch and snapped it on. Her scream was a masterpiece of acting.

Stephen Bruner was dead. He had died very horribly, as though by the fangs of a beast rather than at the hands of the man who was rising from the body, his mouth and fingers blood-smearred, his eyes glaring with insane horror.

"Master Jack!" The butler had known the boy all his life. He scarcely knew this disheveled, red-splotched creature whose bloodstained mouth was laughing in hysterical frenzy, and whose crazy mirth changed abruptly into shrill, nerve-cracking screams.

But Jack was not insane. He lived through a brief trial in which it was conclusively proved that he had murdered his father in a fit of homicidal rage as the result of a domestic quarrel. Temporary insanity, the verdict was. Jack was committed to an institution, and within a few days utilized a splinter of jagged rock to cut his throat neatly and efficiently. The complete estate went, of course, to Jewel.

She held long consultations with Castile, who had sunk into a fitful mood of depression and hopelessness. At the trial he had tried frantically and vainly to break the spell of silence that bound him, and to save Jack. But it was useless. The Seal of Solomon held him in unbreakable fetters.

"You made Jack kill himself," Castile accused Jewel, but she merely smiled and shrugged.

"Does it matter? All that is finished now, Mike." They were in Castile's apartment. He was toying with a tumbler of brandy, and Jewel was at the window, staring out thoughtfully.

"I suppose it's finished—yes. You've got everything you wanted now, haven't you? Aren't you satisfied yet?"

"No," she murmured. "There is one thing more."

"Tommy Hazard, I suppose."

"That's right."

**“WHY** don't you leave the kids alone?" Castile burst out. "They're happy together. After all, Kay's your sister. If you really loved Hazard, you'd want him to be happy. And he wouldn't be happy with you."

"You think not?" Jewel glanced at the ring on her finger.

"Oh, you could force him to love you, like poor Steve Bruner. But that isn't real. Every time he held you in his arms, you'd be thinking, 'This isn't Hazard. He's just an automaton, doing what I want him to do.' Do you think you'd be happy that way?"

"I've thought of that," the girl frowned slightly. "I'll not use the Seal on Tommy."

"The ring has changed you, Jewel."

Castile made a quick gesture. "You're very lovely now, lovelier than you ever were. But even so, Hazard has Kay."

"We're taking the yacht out. Down to the Bahamas, perhaps, or Havana. I want Kay and Tommy to go with us. Arrange it, Mike."

"You quarreled with her?"

"Patch it up. Ask her to forgive me. She'll do what I want. Kay is soft, too soft for her own good. Arrange it."

"No, damn it. I—" Castile bit his lips.

The Seal glittered. As the first gleam of radiance struck it Castile caught his breath, turned, and sprang forward toward the window. He had flung it open and was clambering out when Jewel spoke.

"Mike. Do not move."

The man was statue-still.

"Come here."

His face drawn and haggard, Castile obeyed.

"So you no longer fear death," the girl said, almost tenderly. "Well—" She picked up a sharp-pointed paper-knife from the secretary and placed it in Castile's hand.

"Unbutton your shirt."

Mechanically he obeyed.

"So you are willing to face death. I wonder if you are equally willing to undergo pain? We shall see."

Jewel's eyes flamed sapphire-bright. The signet glowed with its malignant fires.

"Obey."

Stiffly Castile raised the paper-knife and pressed its sharp point into his breast. Suddenly he ripped it down

[Turn Page]

viciously, tearing through skin and flesh, emitting an agonized groan as he did so.

"Again."

"Jewel, don't!"

"Very well." The girl nodded with satisfaction. "You'd better put some iodine on your chest. You will arrange for Kay and Tommy to come with us?"

The Seal of Solomon was dead black, no longer aflame.

"Yes—yes, damn you!" Castile's face was gray and pain-twisted. "I'll do it."

Smiling, Jewel went to the door. She had opened it when the man's voice halted her.

"Jewel."

"Yes?"

Castile's sombre eyes brooded on the girl's face.

"Aren't you ever afraid?" he said.

She laughed, a malicious, tinkling laugh that pealed infectiously from the scarlet, lovely lips.

"Afraid? Of what? What have I to be afraid of, Mike?"

Castile was silent for a moment. Then—

"God," he said, very softly.

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## CHAPTER V

### *The Reaping*

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**J**EWEL had determined not to use the ring in conquering Tommy. She was determined to win him in other ways. She spent considerable time before her dressing table, carefully choosing cosmetics and perfumes. The mirror told her she was very beautiful. And, of course, she was wealthy. That would count. Though she had not told Castile, for some time now, through her brokers, she had been deftly attempting to strip Hazard of his fortune, far smaller now than her own. Money can do a great deal, Jewel had found. Hazard's investments had gone awry, he had lost out unexpectedly in various transactions, and, as a result, when he

accepted Jewel's invitation, he was in extremely bad shape financially.

Money had spoiled Tommy Hazard. In a different environment he might have been an admirable person; but he was woefully weak and passionately fond of luxury. Never in his life had he felt a real emotion. It was strange, therefore, that two women should have loved this handsome, shallow man so deeply and utterly. Kay, realizing her husband's faults, was willfully blind to them; she was contented in his very nearness. And, though she had a few misgivings at Jewel's invitation, she was quite willing to patch up the quarrel and see her sister again. Tommy helped make this decision. Though he did not voice the thought, he realized that a wealthy sister-in-law would be a valuable asset.

So the yacht sailed south to Havana, with the Hazards, Castile, Jewel, and a dozen other guests. Jewel never once used the ring during the trip. Tommy was a bit tired of marriage already, and found Jewel lovelier than he had remembered. Slowly and imperceptibly, his passion mounted, during the course of moonlight strolls on the deck, lonely evenings in the dim salon, swims and conversations on the white, Cuban beach. The alluring nearness of Jewel tantalized him, and, too, there was a definite annoyance in his wife's presence. She was continually interrupting tête-à-tête, trying to keep him away from Jewel.

"Damn it, Kay, I'm not a child," he said one night, after Jewel had left. "We were sitting here on deck talking business—your sister's promised to help me out, you know. I need that help, badly."

"But you leave me alone so much nowadays," Kay said wistfully, slipping her arm around Hazard's shoulders. He shook her off impatiently.

"If Jewel gets insulted, we're on the rocks. I tell you I need her help."

"I'm sorry, Tommy." Kay had the look of a slapped child. "But I get so unhappy. I wish we hadn't come on this trip."

Hazard's brow contracted. He hesitated, and then reached out and drew his wife close.

"Sorry, hon," he said. "I've got so

much on my mind. Business worries. Forgive me."

"Of course." She gave him a lingering, tender kiss. "Tommy, if I thought you didn't love me any more, I don't know what I'd do."

"Don't be silly," he laughed.

"I—I'm a little afraid of Jewel, I think. It's a strange thing to say, but she's changed. Since Dad's death—"

**H**AZARD looked out across the starlit Pacific.

"Yes," he murmured. "She's changed."

Presently he made an excuse and left. A slim, dark figure lounged out of the shadows.

"Hello, Kay," Castile said gently. "All by yourself?"

"Hello, Mike. Yes. Want to sit down?"

"Why don't you go in the salon? They're dancing."

"Why don't you?" she retorted. "You've changed, too, Mike. Ever since Dad died, everybody's changed."

"Except you."

"I'm not the same." She reached up and caught Castile's hands, clinging to them as though for refuge. "Mike, what about it?"

"What?"

"Tommy, and Jewel."

Castile's smile was twisted.

"You're still a kid," he said, with an assumption of mockery. "The first year of marriage is the hardest. The wife's always jealous."

"Yes? Are you going to marry Jewel, Mike?"

Castile's body shook. He turned away and leaned on the rail. Kay came to stand beside him.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

The man bowed his head. He would have given his life to be able to speak, to warn Kay. But the spell of the Seal kept him irretrievably silent.

"Nothing's wrong," he said at last. "Nothing."

And suddenly Kay was in his arms, sobbing, her cheek pillowed against his chest, and he was comforting her like a child.

"It's all right, kid. It's all right."

Vague, meaningless words. For Castile knew Kay was enmeshed hope-

lessly in Jewel's net, and that escape was impossible. If Tommy Hazard had been strong, there might have been hope. But the fool was already infatuated with Jewel, heedless of the pain he was causing his wife. Silently Castile cursed Hazard.

A shadow crossed them—Tommy and Jewel, dancing to a dreamy Strauss waltz.

Clouds blotted out the moon. Castile, looking up, realized that they were in for a blow, a big one.

He was right. That night the clouds banked and piled one upon another, till the sky was dead-black. The wind rose. A driving, icy rain began to fall. The yacht fled north.

All the next day, and well into the next night, the storm continued unabated. The vessel was seaworthy, and the captain and crew able. But more than one of the passengers was seasick; and finally everyone but the crew was ordered off the decks. Caged up in the yacht, the party danced staggeringly and deluged the bartender with orders. By midnight everyone was drunk, save for Kay and Castile, and, of course, Jewel. She moved calm, unperturbed, and lovely through the noise, tumult.

"We're rounding Hatteras," Castile said to Kay. "Nearly home. Glad, kid?"

She didn't answer. Suddenly she rose and left the salon. Castile thought nothing of it till he realized that Jewel and Hazard were also gone.

**H**E GOT unsteadily to his feet, bracing himself against the pitching of the vessel, and followed. But it was ten minutes later before he found his quarry, and in that time the inevitable had happened.

Castile met Hazard standing straddle-legged in the passage.

"Where's Kay?" he said sharply. "Have you seen her?"

"Yeah." Hazard's voice was thick. "I didn't mean to—hit her."

"What?"

"Really, Castile, you saw how things were. A man can't help what he feels. A divorce—"

Castile's hands twitched, but he said nothing. Hazard went on:

"I was, well, kissing Jewel. No harm

in that. Kay came along. She said things. I told her the truth. That I was in love with Jewel."

"Then you hit her?" Castile said, with deadly softness.

"Well, she—"

And suddenly Jewel was standing behind Hazard a cruel, enigmatic smile on her red lips, her eyes alight with triumph and malice. Something he read in that cool gaze made Castile pause.

"Where's Kay?" he whispered.

And, abruptly, Castile knew. With an oath, he turned and was racing along the corridor, up steps, into a night gone mad with roaring storm. The wind smashed icily against him, the rain blinded him. A flash of lightning revealed the deck, empty of any human form— But, no—at the rail—

"Kay!" Castile shouted. He sprang forward, too late. The girl was gone.

She was lost in the tumult of raging seas. Castile seized a life-preserver and flung it out. He had one foot on the rail when a voice called to him.

"Mike!"

Slowly he turned. Jewel was standing at the head of the companion-way, the Seal of Solomon on her hand blazing with weird gleams.

"Come here!"

Castile looked at Jewel. And, quite suddenly, he knew that all the love he had once had for her was gone completely. In its place another love had grown.

Wholeheartedly unselfishly, Castile forgot himself utterly in the realization that he loved Kay. And in that instant the spell snapped and broke.

Castile turned and sprang over the rail.

Jewel remained motionless with shocked surprise. Then she, too, ran to the rail. Clinging to it with both hands, peering through the murk, she strained her eyes in search of Castile or Kay.

Lightning flamed along the clouds. It revealed two heads in the surging green-black waters. Castile saw Kay, swam strongly toward her. Then all was dark.

Again light came. Castile had reached the girl, was bearing her up

in his arms. The life-preserver was being swept toward the two.

Castile gripped it.

A wave carried him in the direction of the yacht as the lightning died.

From the companion-way came Hazard's voice.

"Jewel! Jewel!"

The girl gripping the rail looked around swiftly. She bit her lip, touched the Seal on her finger. Again the lightning blazed out.

With it blazed the Seal of Solomon! Flames of evil made the talisman radiant! Her hand lifted, Jewel stood staring out to sea.

Castile, bearing Kay, was nearly at the yacht's side.

From the ring a pale beam lashed out. It touched Castile's forehead. He looked up and saw Jewel.

His gaze cursed her.

His hands relaxed their grip on the life-preserver. The cork ring was swept away.

Unmoving, unresisting, still cradling the unconscious Kay in one arm, Michael Castile sank beneath the black waters.

**J**EWEL and Tommy Hazard were married less than a month later.

Money can afford to ignore public opinion. The body of Kay had been washed ashore at Hatteras, but Castile's corpse remained unrecovered. However, Hazard was legally free to remarry, and so, as soon as it could be arranged, a ceremony was performed before a justice of the peace, and the couple quietly departed for the docks, from which they were to go abroad.

Hazard's shallow nature had felt the shock of Kay's death for only a brief time. Infatuated as he was with Jewel, he didn't let his mind linger long on unpleasantness. The prospect of a new life stretched alluringly before him, with comfort, luxury—and the beautiful girl he had just married.

There was no wedding supper. The two embarked without fanfare, and Jewel spent a last hour discussing matters with her attorneys. Everything to do with the estate had been placed in their hands. This was the last of business for a long time. A year's honeymoon, traveling all over



the world, enjoying a new-found happiness. . . .

The liner sailed at dusk. The lights of New York fell astern, as Jewel and Hazard stood by the rail, watching the Statue of Liberty fade into a puppet-like figure.

"Happy?" she asked.

"Sure. Aren't you?"

Jewel hesitated. Her thoughts went back over the last year, back to the day she had begun her studies in Castile's strange library. Well, she had won everything she wanted. Money, freedom, the life and the man she loved. And now—what?

She looked at the Seal of Solomon. Without its aid she had stolen Tommy from his wife. It had served its purpose. And, of late, Jewel had begun to feel a queer uneasiness. A belated fear of the uncanny powers she had called on was growing in the back of her mind.

She wanted to forget, now. There would be no more need for the Seal. It was the only link with the past. Suddenly she found herself hating it.

What had Castile said once? "The Seal may bless or curse, depending on how it is used." Well, so far it had blessed. It would have no chance to use its malignant powers now that the need for it had passed.

Jewel slipped the ring from her finger and dropped it overside. As the circlet vanished into the dark a cold, tight band seemed to compress her heart briefly, and involuntarily she shivered. For, suddenly, she remembered another phrase Castile had used.

"It protects the wearer as long as it is worn."

"What did you drop?" Hazard was peering over the rail. "Your—why, where's your ring?"

"It slipped off," Jewel lied. "It doesn't matter. A cheap thing, anyway. Let's go in, Tommy."

He laughed and circled her waist with his arm. Together they left the deck.

**M**IDNIGHT. The ship ploughed through a calm, moonlit ocean. The night air was balmy and pleasant, stars were reflected in the dark, mirror-like surface. In her suite Jewel

slept uneasily, tossing and murmuring—

Suddenly she sat up, eyes wide in the gloom. With a soft cry she reached out and touched the reassuring warmth of Hazard's shoulder beside her. He grunted in his sleep, but did not awaken.

Jewel shivered, even in the warm air. She had dreamed, strange, disturbing dreams. She tried to recall them, but couldn't. There was only a vague memory of something that rocked, rocked endlessly in endless seas, a memory of green depths, and dark eyes that watched, probing into Jewel's—

It was utterly silent. The powerful beat of the great pistons in the ship's heart throbbed through the night. The rippling splash of waves against the side, almost inaudible.

It was too silent.

Jewel shivered again, and glanced up. Moonlight streamed in through the portholes. And, at first, she did not see the shadow on one of the ports.

A darkness filtered down within the moonrays. Slowly, silently, a cloudy blackness obscured the light, till the ports were invisible and the room completely dark. As though caught in the grip of nightmare, Jewel remained immobile, her tongue dry and cleaving to her palate, sitting upright in the bed and staring, staring.

The darkness coalesced into a jet pillar, man-high. Again the moonlight rushed in. And the pillar was no longer black. Nor was it merely a cloud of darkness.

A man stood there.

And, meeting the passionless, cold stare of those unspeakable eyes, Jewel knew that she looked upon a Horror.

It was Michael Castile.

He wore the same clothing as when she had last seen him alive, but green algae and seaweed clung to the dripping garments. Dank hair was pasted damply on the pallid forehead. The white face was without expression. Only the eyes watched, frigidly, accusingly.

Through gray lips Jewel choked out a name.

"Mike—"

The Horror lifted its right arm.

Looking at the hand, Jewel shook with sudden nausea. Some of the fingers had been eaten away so that bone and gristle showed through. But on one finger was—

The Seal of Solomon.

**J**EWEL thrust out imploring, clawing hands. She strove to leap from the bed, to rush to the door. But abruptly the talisman glowed with eerie radiance, and she was frozen motionless.

The Seal flamed bright. Jewel tried to scream; spittle drooled from the corners of her lax mouth. All her beauty was gone under the stress of soul-shattering, abysmal terror.

From the signet leaped a pale ray. It lanced out and was gone. Dazzled for a second, Jewel blinked as her vision accustomed itself to the gloom. Then her heart leaped.

The thing that had been in her room was gone.

At first Jewel dared not believe it. She stared about; then she found that the spell of immobility that had bound her was gone. Sick, shaking with reaction, she fell back on the bed.

Her hand fumbled out.

"Tommy," she gasped. "Oh, Tommy—wake up!"

Then, without warning, Jewel screamed and jerked away, her eyes straining through the shadows as she sought to confirm that which she refused to believe—

A low, snarling growl came out of the darkness.

A knife-edged shriek burst from Jewel's throat.

"Tommy! Tommy! Don't—" she cried hysterically.

Moonlight gleamed on savage fangs as the wolf sprang.

