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The Three From the Tomb

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrill-tale of surgery—three millionaires, dead and buried for months, reappear in the world of the living

HOWARD CLAY returned? It's impossible—Howard Clay has been dead for six months!"

Peter Todd, county detective of the Castletown district, almost shouted the words into the telephone. Jerry Farley, the young reporter who had been lounging in Todd's office, sprang to the detective's side. He heard a woman's excited voice from the receiver.

"We'll be there in ten minutes, Mrs. Clay!" Todd answered. He slammed the receiver down and turned to the reporter.

"There's a story for you, Farley! Howard Clay has been dead and buried for six months and his wife says that five minutes ago he walked into their house with Doctor Charles Curtlin—living!"

"That's not a story—it's a headline!" cried Farley, making for the door. "Come on, Todd—what's delaying you?"

In something less than ten minutes Todd's high-powered open car, driven by his subordinate, Jackson, had whirled across Castletown's traffic-choked business district and was speeding through the tree-shaded suburbs westward. The car drew up in front of a large, rambling brick house with extensive grounds.

A small cluster of excited men and women were gathered on the sidewalk, peering in at the house and talking rapidly. A blue-clad patrolman was hurrying to disperse them and Todd ordered Jackson to remain at the street for the same purpose. Then he and Farley went quickly

up the walk toward the brick mansion's pretentious entrance.

Todd was reaching toward the bell-push when the door was flung open. A dark-haired, middle-aged woman whose face was deathly pale almost pulled them into the hall inside.

"Thank God you've come, Mr. Todd!" she cried. "The servants are all gone—they fled in terror when they first saw him!"

"When they saw whom, Mrs. Clay?" Todd asked crisply.

"My husband—Howard Clay! He walked into the house with Doctor Curtlin hardly twenty minutes ago! I fainted when I saw him, and when I came to I found they had placed me on a couch and had gone into the library—and since my first thought was to call help, I called you!"

"Howard Clay living?" Todd said incredulously. "You're surely suffering from a delusion—it's been a half-year since Clay died and was buried, with half the town at his funeral."

"I know that!" Her voice rose. "I was with him when he died—but he's living now!"

"That is quite correct, Mr. Todd."

They all turned. Two men had come into the hall behind them, from an adjoining room.

One of them was tall and black-haired, with keen black eyes and strong-cut face. But it was the other, the man who had spoken, who held Todd and Farley



"My God, it's Kingley!" cried Helm. "Kingley—living!"

thunderstruck. He was short and thick-set, with graying hair. His plump face was dead-white as though all blood had been drained from it. He was returning their gaze quietly and both the detective and the reporter recognized him in the first mind-dazing moment.

"Great God—Howard Clay!" Todd exclaimed.

"Howard Clay — living — living!" choked Farley.

"Quite correct," Clay repeated. "May I ask why you gentlemen came here?"

Todd gripped himself. "Why did we come? We came to find out what this means, Clay! You were supposed to have died six months ago!"

"I did die six months ago," said Clay quietly.

"What?" Todd cried. "Do you mean to say—?"

"I mean to say that six months ago I did die and was buried, and that I lay dead in my tomb until yesterday I was brought back to life!"

"Brought back to life? By whom?"

"By Doctor Curtlin here. I remember dying, and between that and the time I woke up in Curtlin's laboratory yesterday there is nothing in my mind but darkness."

Todd stared, stunned, from one to the other. Curtlin smiled. "Don't look so dazed, Todd," he said. "Every great scientific discovery of the past has seemed

just as incredible to those who first heard of it as this seems to you."

Farley's mind was working again. "Doctor Curtlin—I remember now," he exclaimed. "You're the physician who kicked up the stir in medical circles two years ago with a claim that you could rebuild and revivify disintegrating life-cells by a new combination of rays."

"That is the basis of my process," Curtlin admitted. "Naturally, I am not going to give its details to any one."

"But you took Clay's body from the tomb," said the awed reporter; "you brought him back to life with that process—"

The voice of the woman behind him interrupted him. "Then you *were* dead, Howard!" she cried. "I knew that you were—I knew—"

Clay's face softened. "I was, but I am living now, Helen," he said. "I would have spared you this shock if I could have." He took a step toward her.

"Don't come near me!" she screamed. "You can't be living now when you say yourself that you were dead! I followed you myself to your tomb, and now—oh God, now you've come back!"

"Helen, I am living!" Clay desperately insisted. "I did die, but I've been brought back to life just as an unconscious man can be brought back to consciousness!"

"I only know that you died and were buried!" she cried. "I won't stay here with you. I'm going to leave this house now!"

"Helen, do I mean nothing more to you than that?" Clay pleaded. "Does the twenty years we lived together mean nothing?"

"I lived those years with a living man," she said unsteadily. "I can't—I can't live with a dead one."

She turned and stumbled from the hall. Clay's face held anguish as he turned toward the others.

"Clay, come out with the truth," Todd urged. "You feigned death and disappeared for some reason, and now you're trying to explain it with this insane story of Curtlin's."

"Is it so insane, Todd?" Curtlin asked. "Life is a mere chemical activity in certain organic substances—is it insane to think that when that activity halts it can be started again?"

Todd ignored him. "You had some reason for disappearing, Clay!" he insisted. "Didn't you tell me a short time before your supposed death that you were uneasy about some threats that had been made against you?"

"I did tell you that but I was wrong," Clay said dully. "It is all as I have said—I died in this house and knew nothing more until I woke in Curtlin's laboratory."

Todd turned to the other. "Curtlin, do you realize what this story of yours will do when it gets out? Millions of people will believe it—will believe that you have actually brought a man back from the dead! Intelligent people will know that it is a fake of some kind, but masses of the ignorant will put full faith in it and it will loose among them a terrific wave of superstition, fanaticism and insanity!"

"I care nothing whatever for the opinions of either intelligent or ignorant," Curtlin calmly answered. "I am giving this experiment of mine a complete test and when I have done so it's my intention to stop—and not until then."

"So you both stick to the story?" Todd said. "It won't do, Clay—sooner or later the truth will be found out!"

"There is nothing to find out," Clay said wearily. "I have told you the truth—please go now, both of you."

TO DD turned helplessly, and Farley followed him out of the door into the late autumn sunlight.

The crowd in the street had increased in numbers despite the efforts of Jackson and the patrolman, those in it gazing with awe-struck faces toward the house. Few seemed in any desire to go closer to the house of the man who had come back from death, but a ripple of excited voices was heard as Todd and Farley emerged.

Todd paid no attention to them other than to bid the patrolman to retain his post in front of the house. In a low voice he ordered Jackson to remain and keep an unobtrusive watch over the Clay place, and then he and Farley climbed into the car. Todd paused, though, as he was about to start the car.

The door of the Clay residence had opened and Helen Clay was coming down the walk, a small suitcase in her hand. She moved like one in a dream, her face devoid of color, and the whispering on-lookers hastily made way for her as she stepped toward a hastily summoned taxicab that had just dashed up. Todd and Farley glimpsed the dead-white face of Clay staring from a window after the cab as it drove away. It vanished in a moment, and Todd drove away.

When they reached his office in the graystone county building a little later, Todd and Farley reached together for the telephones. For the next minutes Farley poured a stream of facts into the ears of an eager city editor. He learned that already the wildest rumors concerning Clay's return from the dead and Curtlin's part in it were sweeping through the city. When he hung up he found that Todd too had finished and was staring at the wall with knitted brows.

"This business is incredible, Farley," Todd said. "I've been talking to Helm, the doctor who attended Clay and signed his death certificate, and Morton, the undertaker who had charge of his burial."

"What did they say?" asked the reporter quickly.

"Helm said that Clay died quite suddenly from heart-failure and that there was not the slightest doubt he was dead —his heart having stopped, his lungs collapsed, and rigor mortis setting in. He said he'd swear that Clay was not in any cataleptic condition or trance but was stone-dead. Morton said the same thing —that he'd prepared Clay for burial himself, and that he'd take oath that he was dead."

"Good Lord!" Farley exclaimed. "Then Curtlin did bring him back to life—a man dead for months!"

"He did not!" Todd said savagely. "Clay is living now and that means he was never dead!"

"But Helm and Morton are men of unimpeachable character — they both knew Clay and you say they swear he was dead. His wife says he was dead—she can't believe he's living now—and Clay himself admits it."

"I'll never believe that Curtlin or any other man can bring the dead to life!" Todd asserted. "There's something behind this—this fantastic story of Curtlin reviving the dead is only a blind to conceal the true facts as to Clay's disappearance and return."

"But why should Clay have wanted to disappear? He had no financial worries, being a millionaire two or three times over. He wasn't mixed up with any woman, for you saw how devoted he is to his wife."

"You heard him admit that he told me before his supposed death about threats made to him," Todd reminded. "That has something to do with this—I wish I knew just what."

"You mean that Clay feigned death to escape some danger? I don't believe it! No matter what reasons he might have had, his wife and Helm and Morton all swear he was really dead, and it's impossible that they should all be in a conspir-

acy. Not to speak of Curtlin! Why, Curtlin's one of the biggest medical men in this part of the country! He has a record in a half-dozen lines—is a brilliant biologist, a brilliant bacteriologist, a brilliant plastic surgeon and I don't know what else. Curtlin would hardly lend himself to a conspiracy such as you seem to think exists."

"Then you think Curtlin did take Clay's six-months' dead body from his tomb and bring it back to life?" Todd asked unbelievingly.

"I think that, and it's what the city and the nation and the world will think when this news spreads," Farley asserted. "Todd, your criminal experience has warped you—you're not up against some petty plot here but against an epoch-making scientific achievement. To bring the dead back to life—why, Curtlin's name will be ringing around the world in a few days!"

Todd rose. "You may be right, but while it's ringing I'm going to follow this case in my own warped and petty way. And I'm going to find out first whether there was actually a body buried in Howard Clay's coffin and whether Curtlin did take that body."

"You're fighting against facts, but I'll stay with you," Farley said. "You're going to the cemetery now?"

The detective nodded. "The Clay vault is in Greenview—it's just at the edge of town."

THE autumn twilight was thickening when Todd and Farley reached the cemetery. It lay on a long slope just beyond the suburbs, a forest of white stones and shafts that showed palely in the dusk. In summer sunlight the place would have seemed peaceful, but beneath the chill and darkness of gathering night it was oppressive.

The two drove through its curving

white roads toward the adjoining cottage of the cemetery's caretaker. When they reached the small stone house they had hardly knocked before the door opened. A thin, elderly man with worried countenance faced them, and Farley thought that he paled as he recognized them.

"You're Binns, the caretaker here, aren't you?" Todd asked, as they stepped inside.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Todd." The man seemed making an effort to remain calm. "When I heard the news from town I thought you'd be out here soon."

"You've heard about Howard Clay's return?" Todd asked keenly. "Then you know why I came out here?"

"I do, and I may as well tell you the truth straight off. There is no body in Howard Clay's coffin and there hasn't been for the last four months!"

"Go on," said Todd grimly.

"I will, sir. Four months ago I was awakened near midnight by a sound out in the cemetery. I dressed hastily and went out with my electric lantern, just in time to see a truck running without lights turn out of the cemetery and speed away. I was alarmed and began an immediate inspection to see what had been taking place.

"I found that the Clay vault had been broken into and that Howard Clay's coffin was empty. But I found more than that, too! Two other private vaults had been broken into, the Barton and Kingley ones! And in those the coffins of Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley were empty!"

"The three bodies that had been taken were those of the three richest and most important men who had died in the last year! Because of that I knew that if I reported it I would lose my job at once, so said nothing in the hope that the robbery would not be discovered. Now this return of Howard Clay has brought it all

out, but I'm telling you the whole truth. Whoever took Clay's body took those of Barton and Kingley too."

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BARTON and Kingley's bodies gone too!" Farley gasped. "Todd, this must mean—"

"It means complications," said Todd, his face grim. "Binns, did you have no clue at all as to who committed the robbery?"

"None at all, sir—I just got a glimpse of the truck and that was all," the caretaker answered. "But they're saying in town that Doctor Curtlin admitted taking Howard Clay's body and bringing him back to life. That means it must have been he who took the bodies of Barton and Kingley, too."

"Whether he did or not," Todd said, "will have to be proved. Binns, before long there will be a flock of reporters and curious people out here asking you about Howard Clay's coffin. Tell them all you've told us, except the part about Barton and Kingley. Don't let any one know that any bodies other than that in Clay's coffin were taken."

"I won't," the other promised. "You'll maybe put in a word for me with the cemetery directors?"

"If you do as I've asked," Todd agreed. "I want to use your telephone for a moment now and then Farley and I are going back."

When Todd finished his brief telephone conversation and joined Farley in the car, darkness had fallen. He switched on the lights and was silent as they drove back out through the cemetery's winding ways.

"Well," Farley finally said, "this must have convinced you that you were wrong about Curtlin and Clay, Todd."

"Why should it?" the detective coun-

tered. "I expected to find that Howard Clay's coffin had been robbed."

"But you didn't expect the bodies of Barton and Kingley to be gone too! That fact alone shows that this was no mere plot to cover up Clay's disappearance, for in that case why should these two other bodies have been taken?"

"Why do you think they were taken?" Todd asked.

"I think Curtlin took all three bodies to subject to his process," Farley affirmed promptly, "and that with the process he has already brought the first of the three, Howard Clay, back to life! Curtlin said himself that he meant to give his process a complete test and then drop it once and for all, and I think that means he is going to bring Barton and Kingley back to life too."

"Howard Clay, Willis Barton, and Stephen Kingley," mused the detective. "Why did Curtlin select those three for his test, if you're right? They all died in the last year, or were supposed to have died, they were all rich, millionaires and more, and they were all of middle age or over. There's something behind those facts—something that eludes me."

"Todd, you're chasing your nose!" Farley declared. "Look at the facts. Curtlin announced two years ago that he was working on a process to restore in dead and decaying cells the chemical activity of life. Biologists and physicians who heard his address on the subject said that the idea was far-fetched but not impossible. He must have been working on the process ever since, and finally perfected it."

"To test it, he took those three bodies from the cemetery. He selected the bodies of wealthy and important citizens because, being well-known, there was no doubt as to their deaths and if he did bring them to life there could be no cries that they had never been dead. Curtlin

did bring the first of them, Howard Clay, back to life, and quite naturally at once told of his experiment and its success. Those are the simple facts, Todd, but because they're too startling for you to accept you build up moonshine plots and conspiracies of whose existence you haven't one scrap of real evidence!"

Todd smiled. "I don't say you're wrong, Farley. But I do deny that Curtlin or any other scientist can work miracles."

"What are you going to do, then—tell Clay that he is really dead and ought to go back to the cemetery?"

"No, hardly that," the detective answered. "Farley, you've been in with me in lots of cases and have kept back from your paper part of what you learned when I asked you, haven't you?"

"Yes, and I get your meaning," Farley said. "You want me too to keep quiet about Barton and Kingley."

"About that, and about what we're now going to do."

"What *are* we going to do?"

"We're going to have a look inside the house and laboratories of Doctor Charles Curtlin," Todd told him.

"Todd, that's a risky business, without a search warrant!"

"Not too risky—my telephone call back there was to Jackson. He's still watching Clay's house and he says Curtlin is still there. That gives us a free hand, for I doubt that Curtlin would have any servants around his place at night."

"It'll be wasted effort," Farley predicted, "prowling around Curtlin's place when other reporters are getting interviews from him. But I'm with you, and I'll give that wolf of a city editor no more than you say."

"All right, then—Curtlin's place is over in the northern district," Todd told him. "House, office and laboratories combined—we'll be there in ten minutes."

Thereafter they were silent as Todd drove across the outlying sections of the city. He kept to the greater darkness of the lesser arteries of traffic, avoiding the light-rimmed lanes in which the golden headlights of many cars swept in toward the central city in a shining stream. They could hear newsboys shouting extras as they crossed these busier streets, and the excited voices of men who that night had but one subject for conversation.

They soon entered into a district of old-fashioned houses, for the most part surrounded by spacious grounds. Todd stopped the car by the curb in the darkness between two street-lights, and he and Farley emerged from it without words. The detective led the way at once from the broad street into an unlighted alley or way running parallel with it some distance behind it.

THE blackness was chartless to the reporter but Todd appeared to know his way. They followed the unpaved alley for a few minutes, passing between two rows of houses all of a thousand feet apart, visible only by their lighted windows. Then Todd made a cautioning gesture, led in past a low garage-building and toward a large stone house which was completely dark.

It also was surrounded by a large plot of ground, and the two crossed a service-lawn and a small garden and then stood motionless by its wall, listening. There was no sound from within or around the place, and Farley's spirits rose. It had been his fear that the unparalleled sensation of which Curtlin was the center would have brought a horde of the curious to the place, but it was evident that the news of the work Curtlin had carried on there had been enough to make the place conspicuously shunned after night.

Todd seemed satisfied that the coast was clear, for he now led on again. He

stopped by a basement window and crouched over this. It was locked, but Todd worked at it with a glittering little instrument. There came the snip of severing steel, and he softly swung the window open, then swung silently down into the dark interior.

His face reappeared as a white blur inside the dark window, his hand beckoning wordlessly. Farley swung down after him, Todd holding and steadyng the reporter. They stood touching, listening. There was no sound from the house above them. Todd moved, and then from his pocket-flash a little light-beam winked through the darkness.

It disclosed the fact that they were standing in a furnace-room. Todd located the door, and they passed through it to find themselves in a short hall.

Across this hall from them a steel door faced them, and beside them a flight of steps led upward. Todd motioned toward the door.

"That will be the laboratory," he whispered. "It's all I want to see tonight—we've not got time to go through the whole place."

"This door's locked," Farley reported, trying it.

"Stand aside," the detective said, "and we'll see how good its lock is."

He had taken a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and silently and rapidly he tried them in the steel door's lock. At last there came a welcome click and the door swung open.

They went a few steps inside and then Todd's beam winked. It disclosed no windows; so he turned and found the switch beside the door, and turned on the lights.

Flooded with light, the room disclosed itself to them as a large, long laboratory. It was concrete-walled and floored, quite without windows, but with ventilation-

tubes. It held an amazing array of machinery and instruments.

Todd and Farley saw a large motor-generator and a series of transformers along one side of the room. A clutter of lamps, resistances and meters were connected with them and with a series of black-cased instruments quite unfamiliar in appearance. Heavily insulated cables in overhead racks carried most of the wiring.

These cables seemed to lead to another unfamiliar instrument suspended from the ceiling, an oblong thing like a big rectangular searchlight with thick lens of quartz or dull-glass pointing downward. Directly beneath it stood a six-foot long metal table, raised on insulated standards.

Beside this was a larger table, and on it two long objects wrapped in white sheets. Todd and Farley reached them together, turned back the coverings. The reporter recoiled at what met their eyes. They were bodies, the bodies of two middle-aged men. They had been dead for some time, time already having made ravages upon the bodies, but their faces were clear, unmistakable.

"Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley!" Farley exclaimed. "It was Curtlin who took all three bodies, then, for sure!"

"I expected to find them here," said Todd, unmoved.

"But this proves for certain that I was right!" the reporter said. "Curtlin took the bodies of the three—he's already brought Clay's back to life and is no doubt getting ready to do the same with these of Barton and Kingley."

"It proves that it was Curtlin who robbed those three coffins, at least," said Todd, his voice harsh. "With Clay living I couldn't charge him with taking Clay's body, but this is different—this gives me a charge on which to hold Curtlin."

"You're surely not going to arrest Curtlin on a grave-robbing charge!" Far-

ley exclaimed. "Why, Todd, you'll be snowed under with ridicule and indignation! No doubt Curtlin broke the letter of the law in taking the three bodies, but his bringing of one of them back to life is such a stupendous thing that he can't be held to account."

"He'll be held until he comes clean about this business," Todd answered. "I'm going to get a warrant the first thing tomorrow morning."

"Have it your own way, then," Farley said. "You'll find you're making a terrific mistake."

Todd did not answer other than to snap out the lights and lead the way into the hall again, relocking the door. They clambered out through the window by which they had entered, and in a few minutes had reached the car unobserved and were heading into town.

THEY found that the sensation of the afternoon had produced there an unprecedented excitement. The names of Curtlin and of Clay were on the lips of every one, and Curtlin's statement was being argued by groups on every corner. For the citizens of Castleton were divided over it.

Half of them, including all who had chanced to see Clay, were asserting that Curtlin had accomplished the greatest achievement in history. Clay was living: there could be no possible doubt as to that, and neither could there be any doubt that Clay had been dead, they argued. They pointed out that Curtlin's idea had been deemed possible by scientists when propounded two years before. Every bit of evidence supported the fact that he had achieved the incredible and had brought back to life a man who had lain dead for months in his tomb.

Others scoffed at the possibility of such a thing. They could not deny that Clay was living, but they denied that he had

ever been dead. Some one else had died and been buried in his place, they asserted. It was learned that shortly after nightfall an examination of the Clay vault at the cemetery had been made, and that as expected Clay's coffin was empty. But that did not prove, the doubters asserted, that it was Clay's body that had formerly occupied the coffin.

The city hung with tense interest upon the question as to whether Clay had or had not been dead. Helm, the doctor, and Morton, the undertaker, whom Todd had previously questioned, felt impelled to make affidavits to the effect that they had handled Howard Clay's body after his death and that he had been unquestionably dead. As both Helm and Morton were men of undoubted integrity, their statements added fuel to the flames.

Yet Curtlin, rather than Clay, was the center of interest. Clay himself had received but a single group of former friends and reporters. Seeming to shrink in dread from the blaze of publicity in which he found himself, Clay had only reiterated his statement that he had known nothing from the time he died until he had awakened in Curtlin's laboratory. Beyond that he would not talk of his experience, but Curtlin was more communicative.

Curtlin calmly stated that he had actually brought Clay's corpse into life again by the ray-process he had announced two years before, but that he did not intend ever to divulge the details of that process. It was not his plan, he added, to attempt a general resurrection of the dead, for it was his belief that the process would be useless on the dead of more than eight or nine months back. In any case, he repeated, his intention was to give the process a thorough testing and then drop it forever.

In that pronouncement of Curtlin's, Farley read confirmation of his own be-

lief. "It's just as I told you," he told Todd when they had heard. "Curtlin's going on and test the thing on those other two bodies and then drop it."

"Why should he drop it if it's actually successful?" asked Todd skeptically.

"Because he knows what it would do to the world if he kept it up, or let the process be published. Think of a world in which the dead could be brought back at will! A world in which corpses could be revived, perhaps time after time! Fear—fear of death—is the mainspring of civilization, and Curtlin knows if he publishes his process the mainspring is broken!"

Todd shook his head. "Farley, I've seen a lot of weird things happen or seem to happen in my time, but underneath every one of them I found some crooked game. Curtlin has one, though I don't know what it is. But when I get that warrant tomorrow morning and bring him in, you'll see that sooner or later he'll come out with it."

"You're wrong, Todd—you don't know how wrong," said Farley. "But I'll be here in the morning, for when you arrest Curtlin the story about the bodies of Barton and Kingley will break."

Farley left with that and reached his rooms, weary from the exciting day. He set his alarm-clock for an early hour and turned in, sinking at once into sleep.

He awoke the next morning to rush through dressing and breakfast and start at once for the gray county building. As he neared it he noticed that around it groups had formed in the morning crowds, talking excitedly. It was apparent that the sensation of the preceding day was intensified. Wondering whether Todd had already arrested Curtlin, Farley broke into a run. He gave a sigh of relief as he saw Todd and Jackson emerging rapidly from the building.

"Todd!" he exclaimed as he reached them. "You're going after Curtlin now?"

"That's off, Farley," Todd answered. "Something has happened!"

"What is it?"

"You remember that we saw Willis Barton's body there in Curtlin's laboratory last night?"

"Yes, but what's happened? Has Barton's body been missed at the cemetery?"

"More than that," said Todd, grim-voiced. "Fifteen minutes ago Willis Barton walked into his own house—alive!"

3

"**B**ARTON alive!" cried Farley. "Good God, Todd, this is proof absolute of Curtlin's statement! We saw Barton's body there ourselves—a body that had been dead for months!"

"It's proof that there's more to this than I thought," Todd said. "Get in the car, Farley—we're going out to see Barton now. Whatever kind of devil's work this is, I'm going to get to the bottom of it."

"You're crazy!" Farley exclaimed as the car leapt forward. "If you don't believe in this now you're fighting what you yourself know to be the truth!"

"We'll see," said Todd shortly. "There's still something I've got to see explained—still something."

The car was tearing westward across the city through the morning sunlight, dodging through the lines of city-bound commuters as Jackson drove it with increased speed through the suburbs.

"How did you get the news of Willis Barton returning?" Farley asked, holding his hat against the rush of wind.

"Lodgekeeper at Barton's place called," Todd said. "Said that a car drove in that had Barton and Doctor Curtlin in it. They went into the house and then Curtlin came out and drove off. The

lodgekeeper had heard about Clay returning from the dead and when he saw Willis Barton doing the same thing he was scared and called me straight off."

"Thank God, Barton's family is in Europe!" Farley said. "The shock of his return might have killed his wife and daughters as it almost did Mrs. Clay."

"What was Barton supposed to have died of?" Todd asked as they rounded a turn on two wheels.

"Apoplexy, about seven months ago," the reporter answered. "But it wasn't supposed, Todd—he did die! Damn it, man, we saw his body ourselves last night! Curtlin must have gone home last night and put his process to work on it, brought Barton back to life just as he did Clay! This clinches Curtlin's statement all right!"

Todd made no answer, for Jackson was bringing the car to a halt at a gateway of iron flanked by great stone pillars, from which in turn extended a long stone wall on either side.

Inside the gates and beside the lodge-house a weather-beaten elderly man was standing guard. He peered at them, then swung the gates open.

"It's you, Mr. Todd—I am not supposed to open to any one without word from the house, but you can go on in."

"That's all right," Todd said. "We'll take the responsibility for it."

"You needn't for my sake," the other said. "I am quitting here this day—a place where the dead come back as though alive is no place for me."

The car leapt through the gateway and down a long, tree-bordered drive toward the bulky white mansion visible ahead. They drew up in front of the big building's main entrance, and Todd and Farley walked quickly up to the door. They had rung for but a minute before the door opened and a tall and truculent-looking man confronted them.

Todd and Farley gasped, unnerved. They had expected a servant to answer the door and this was the man they had come to see. They stared at him, unable to believe their eyes. The tall, big-boned figure, the iron-gray hair, the strong-jawed face—it was the man they had seen lying in death and decay in Curtlin's laboratory! But now he stood living before them! Only his face was dead-white still, as Clay's had been.

"Willis Barton!" Todd was exclaiming, half to himself. "Willis Barton, and living now!"

"Mr. Todd, this is an intrusion!" Barton barked angrily. "I gave no orders that you were to be admitted."

"My God, Barton!" Farley burst out. "Do you realize that you were dead and have been brought back—the second man in two days?"

The reporter's word seemed to unleash Barton's fury. "What if I was dead? I'm living now and I'm going to be treated as a living man and not as some museum curiosity!"

"Calm down, Barton," Todd said sharply. "I've got a few questions to ask you, and living or dead you're subject to the law."

"Ask them and be done, then," Barton snapped. "I'm in no mood to go through an inquisition."

"Your death in this house was reported seven months ago. Can you say where you have been since then?"

"Of course not! I remember absolutely nothing from the moment I died until I awoke an hour ago in Curtlin's laboratory."

"Did Curtlin tell you that he had also brought Clay back to life?"

"He told me—yes. I can hardly believe anything of this so far, my mind is so confused."

"Did you know Curtlin well before your—er—death?" Todd pursued.

"Not well," said Barton, frowning. "I was acquainted with him and knew of some of his work by reputation."

"One question more," Todd said. "About nine months ago a half-dozen important men in this town told me, at different times, that they had received mysterious and rather alarming threats. Clay was one of these, and you, Barton, were another. Did these vague threats you told me of then have anything to do with your supposed death and revival?"

"Absolutely not!" flamed Barton. "The threats I told you about were mere crank-letters—they had nothing at all to do with this, and I refuse to answer any more of your questions. I have broken no laws and I will not be treated as a criminal suspect."

"Mr. Barton, one minute!" Farley detained him. "Wouldn't you give me a short statement for publication on your sensations in dying and reviving? It would be of world-wide interest."

"I can not," Barton answered shortly. "I promised Doctor Curtlin that I would give no information that might in any way disclose the details of his process. Gentlemen, I bid you good day."

THE door shut hard and Todd and Farley stared at each other, then turned toward the car. From it Jackson had been a spectator of their interview and his voice was excited as they entered the car.

"Willis Barton all right, wasn't it? This will tear the town apart for fair!"

"It's likely to tear the world apart," Farley declared as their car swung back down the drive. "I'm beginning to see now why Curtlin is so set against letting any one know his process."

"I think I'm beginning to see why too," Todd said.

Farley turned to face him. "Todd, if you still have any skepticism as to Curtlin's achievement you're just plain crazy! We saw Willis Barton dead there in the laboratory last night—dead for months. We saw Willis Barton standing living before us now! In the name of common sense what more do you want?"

"I want one thing explained," Todd said. "Just one thing."

"Lord, look ahead here!" Jackson interrupted. "Seems like half the town's out here already!"

They were nearing the gates and could see that a crowd of excited people numbering hundreds was gathered outside them, increasing rapidly. The lodgekeeper was working his best to keep them out, but while he guarded the gates newspaper and cameramen were climbing the wall on either side. A squad of police was just dashing up, emerging from their car and endeavoring to disperse the crowd.

The gates swung inward to allow their own car to pass out, and as it did so others in the crowd managed to slip through. When they were again in the street and Jackson was pointing the car toward town, Farley looked back.

"Barton's sure going to have a time with the newspapermen in the next few hours," he said. "They're pouring into town from every quarter of the compass."

"It's to be expected," Todd said. "And the thing has hardly sunk in yet—when it does there'll be hell here."

"It's put this town on the map with a bang, all right," Farley agreed. "Todd, I hope you're convinced by now that this thing is no mere criminal plot."

"I'm convinced that you're convinced," Todd answered dryly. "I'm going to see Curtlin now—are you coming with me?"

"Right with you—from now on every word of Curtlin's is news. There'll prob-

ably be more reporters at this place than at Barton's."

FARLEY found his prediction verified when they reached Curtlin's establishment a little later. As they drove up to the big house they saw that a dense crowd choked the street outside it, larger by several times than that they had left at Barton's. The crowd was evidently in a state of highest excitement, and blue-clad officers were trying in vain to scatter it.

Todd's badge passed him and the reporter through the officers, and they went inside. It was their first glimpse of the interior proper of the place, since in their burglarious entry of the preceding night they had confined themselves to the laboratory below. The ground floor was fitted up to hold offices and a small clinic, and these rooms were filled with several dozen excited newspapermen, cameramen and officials.

All were pressing toward Curtlin, whose tall figure rose near a corner, the center of attraction. Curtlin was answering, calmly and deliberately, the rapid-fire questions of the excited reporters.

"No, I refuse entirely to allow any one an inspection of my laboratory," he was saying with finality. "I have said that my process shall not be divulged and I mean it."

"But, Doctor Curtlin!" one of the newspapermen pleaded. "You can't treat the reading public in this way—we have pictures of Clay and Barton and yourself and the cemetery—all we need is one of the laboratory in which you brought them back to life."

"I have not the slightest interest in the reading public," Curtlin replied. "I am carrying out a scientific experiment, and it has absolutely no concern with the public."

Todd had pushed through the throng

to Curtlin's side. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind answering one or two questions of my own?" he asked.

Curtlin recognized him. "Mr. Todd, the skeptical representative of law and order!" he said, his black eyes mocking. "What is it you would like to know?"

"I'd like to know, if it isn't giving anything away, just how long your process of revival takes?"

"I've no objection to telling that. After the preliminary preparations are made the ray-process itself requires only about thirty minutes."

"Can you tell us when you began using the process upon Willis Barton's body?"

"About four this morning. When I had brought him back it took a little time for him to accustom himself to what had happened, and then I drove him out to his home."

If Todd was disappointed his face did not show it. He changed his tack.

"Curtlin, you'll admit, I suppose, that you were the one who took the bodies of Howard Clay and Willis Barton from the cemetery four months ago. Did you know that the body of Stephen Kingley was taken also at that time?"

"Yes," said Curtlin calmly. "I took it myself, and Kingley's body is down in my laboratory now."

His answer created a sensation among the newspapermen who had been crowding closer to listen.

"What? Do you mean to say that you're going to bring Kingley back to life too, Doctor Curtlin?" cried one of them.

"I mean just that," Curtlin replied. "I had not intended to announce it just yet, but since Todd's question has brought it out I have no objection to doing so. Four months ago I deliberately broke the law in taking from the cemetery the three bodies of Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley. I felt that I was justified in doing so by the tremendous

importance of the work I meant to attempt with them."

"One moment, Doctor," a sharp-faced reporter interrupted. "It is known that you are not a rich man—did you select the bodies of these three wealthy men with the idea that they would each pay you a large fee for bringing them back to life?"

"Absolutely no!" Curtlin snapped. "I selected Clay and Barton and Kingley because it was beyond doubt that they were dead and if my experiment succeeded it could not be said that the subjects of it had never been dead. I brought the three bodies here, and for four months they have been down in my laboratory while I worked to make my process capable of the rebuilding and revivification of human tissues.

"I finally succeeded in doing so but a few days ago. I prepared Clay's body and using the process on him yesterday brought him back to life. Because there seemed doubt on the part of many as to the reality of my achievement, I used the process on Barton's corpse early this morning and was able to revive him also.

"It was and is my purpose to test the process finally on the third body, that of Kingley, and then to consider the experiment concluded and to drop it forever, to smash my apparatus and burn my notes. For as I have said, and as I firmly believe, this bringing of the dead to life is important and valuable as a laboratory achievement but would wreck civilization if it were put into the hands of humanity. For that reason I am concluding the experiment with Kingley and am resolved never to work again on it thereafter."

"But when are you going to bring Kingley back to life, then?" Farley asked. The crowd hung tensely on the answer.

"I can see that I'll not be let alone until it's finished," Curtlin said. "Well, I've already made the preliminary chem-

ical preparations with Kingley's body—I'll start the ray-process on it after eleven and will have him living by noon."

There was an excited burst of hoarse voices. "But you'll allow us to be here?" some one pleaded. "You'll allow us to see Kingley's body before you do it?"

"I will under certain conditions," Curtlin answered sharply. "In the first place, no one is going to enter my laboratory, during the process or before or after it. I want the police-guard here doubled to make sure of that. You may wait in these rooms, however, while the process is going on.

"In the second place, I have no objection to your seeing and examining Kingley's dead body before I begin the process. But I will have it in these rooms for you at eleven, and you'll view it here before I take it back to the laboratory. I have no objection to your satisfying any doubts you may have, but I am resolved that under no circumstances shall any one witness my process or apparatus."

"Great heavens!" cried some one. "What a story!"

"Todd—you heard!" Farley exclaimed. "This means final public proof of the thing!"

Todd's face was set. "For the present," Curtlin was saying, "I must ask all of you to leave, as I have much to do. At eleven you can return, but until then you'll find it useless to try to pass the police I have asked here to guard the place. Please leave now, gentlemen."

"One final question!" shouted a reporter. "Will Clay and Barton, the men you've already brought to life, be here when you revive Kingley?"

"I have no doubt that they will," Curtlin said, "as both of them are naturally highly interested in my work. No more questions, now—please go."

As the excited throng poured out into the choked street Farley grasped Todd's

arm. "Todd, this is the end of all doubt! You'll be here at eleven when he does it?"

"I'll be here," Todd answered. "And we'll see what we will see."

BOTH Farley and Todd had evidence in the next few hours of the wild and unparalleled excitement that Curtlin's new statement had let loose. The city of Castleton was seething with it, and it centered around that big, old-fashioned house, guarded by blue-clad police on all sides, that they had just left.

Farley hastened through shouting streets in which all ordinary activities had halted, to find the offices of his newspaper the scene of even greater excitement. His latest news was literally torn from him and rushed upon the press. The teletype wires that connected with the far-flung nervous system of the world's information facilities were hot with appeals for more and still more facts on this stunning thing.

The names of Curtlin and Clay and Barton and Kingley were going out to the world by telegraph and telephone and written word. Every train that entered Castleton was disgorging new scores of newspapermen, photographers and special writers. Planes were coming in from distant cities with others.

When Farley returned to Curtlin's place a full hour before the appointed hour of eleven, he found the scene there one of chaos. The streets for blocks around were packed with hoarse-voiced humanity through which he had to push his way. He reached the house to find that the double rank of police outside it were inexorably holding out the mob of reporters and citizens.

Farley, pushing to the front, saw that the house itself presented no sign of life. Of Curtlin nothing could be seen, but he

learned from a fellow newsman that he had appeared for a brief moment at one of the lower windows. He learned also that save for the police who guarded it on all sides Curtlin was apparently working alone in the house, not risking the presence of any aids or servants.

As the hours of eleven approached, the crowd became denser and greater, almost unmanageable. Farley glimpsed Todd, his face still set and grave, struggling through the throng. The detective saw him and pushed toward him. There came a sudden tremendous roar of excited voices as Clay and Barton arrived, almost at the same time.

Each of the two was protected by an escort of a half-dozen policemen who pushed a way for them through the mob. Both Clay and Barton seemed stunned by the scene about them, their dead-white faces glancing desperately this way and that. The passage through the crowd of these two men whom all in it knew to have been dead created a tremendous sensation, and during it Todd reached Farley's side.

"It's almost time!" Farley told the detective over the roar of voices. "Helm and about a half-dozen doctors are in this crowd—going to make sure that Kingley is dead, all right!"

"How about Kingley's relatives?" Todd asked.

"None here. He was a bachelor with some cousins, but they're too far away to get here. But look—there's Curtlin now!"

The door of the house had opened and Curtlin had emerged onto its veranda, bareheaded and in white laboratory-jacket. Another excited roar split the air but Curtlin did not heed it, spoke crisply to the captain of the police before the house. Clay and Barton had passed through these and were joining Curtlin on the veranda,

seeming half-dazed. The three passed into the house and the mob surged irresistibly forward.

Todd and Farley were in its front rank and were hastily let through by the officers. The latter were struggling to keep back the tremendous horde of the curious and admit only the limited number of officials and reporters Curtlin had specified. These hastened in and in hardly more than a minute Todd and Farley found the rooms about them filled with excited men.

CLAY and Barton stood dazedly against the wall, but Curtlin stood at the center of his clinic room beside a wheeled steel table that bore a long, white-wrapped figure. The sight of that as much as Curtlin's commanding black eyes swept the rooms to silence.

"The body of Stephen Kingley is here beside me," his incisive voice told them, "and I am willing that a limited number of you ascertain for yourself that Kingley is actually dead. But there will be no crowding and no disorder or you will all be excluded from these rooms."

A tall, lanky man stepped forward. "No objection to my looking at him, I presume?" he asked.

"None at all, Doctor Helm," said Curtlin promptly. "Since I see Doctors Braun and Leonard also here they also may look, if they care. You are all competent medically and all knew Kingley by sight."

He reached and turned back the white sheet that covered the figure on the wheeled table. An involuntary sigh went up as Kingley's body was exposed, with all its evidence of death and decay. A pungent odor of strong and unfamiliar chemicals filled the room.

"Kingley, all right," said Helm after one glance at the dead-white face, and

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Braun and Leonard nodded. They bent over the body and then Helm straightened.

"There is no need for an examination, Doctor Curtlin," he said. "I presume that every man in this room can see that Kingley is dead and has been for some months."

"Dead, all right," said Doctor Leonard, straightening. "From heart-failure in this case also, if I remember rightly?"

"Yes," said Curtlin. "Is every one satisfied that Kingley is dead? Mr. Todd—wouldn't you like to set your doubts at rest?"

At Curtlin's mocking challenge a laugh went up, but Todd moved to the table's side. "Don't mind if I do," he said quietly, gazing at the body before him.

When he stepped back Curtlin recovered the body with the sheet. "I am now going to take the body back down to the laboratory and subject it to the ray-process," he stated. "When I have finished you shall know, but until I do, the guards here will prevent any one from penetrating to the lower floor."

Helm and Leonard stepped forward to grasp the table's edge, but Curtlin motioned them decisively back. "Two of the officers will help me wheel this down," he told them.

He signed to two of the policemen and they grasped the light steel table at either end and proceeded with it toward the stairs leading downward. Curtlin followed them as they lifted it down the steps, and in a moment the two came back and took their place with the others guarding the door of the stairs. In a moment came the click of a steel door opening and closing beneath, and a storm of excited voices again broke out in the rooms.

"Todd, you saw for yourself!" Farley

said. "It was Kingley, dead! Just as when we saw him in the laboratory last night!"

"It was Kingley and he was dead, yes," Todd answered.

"You'll have to believe if he does it this time—you'll have to!"

"What's he doing down there?" asked a reporter beside them in an awed voice. "Listen!"

A steady purring sound had become audible from below, rising rapidly into a loud whine as of great dynamos. Soon it was joined by a steady buzzing.

"He's doing it!" muttered another. "He's bringing that corpse back to life! My God, are we all crazy?"

"What about it, Mr. Clay?" some one asked one of the two dead-faced men by the wall. "Can't you or Barton give us some idea as to the general nature of Curtlin's process?"

"I know nothing—nothing!" said Clay, his hands trembling.

"Listen to them outside!" Farley exclaimed. "They're going crazy out there waiting for news!"

The dull roar of voices from without was audible above the whining, buzzing sounds from below. Minutes were fleeting. Farley found his own hands shaking, but Todd's face was unchanged.

"Curtlin says he's going to wreck his apparatus as soon as this is over," some one else was saying. "If he doesn't, God help humanity!"

"It's too late," another answered. "They'll get the secret of his process out of him some way, sooner or later."

"Listen!" exclaimed a reporter. "The sounds down there have stopped!" The whine and buzz had halted abruptly but as suddenly began again. Then in moments—

"They've stopped again! I can't hear a thing from down there now!"

Farley found Helm beside him, the doctor's face wet with sweat. "Why in God's name doesn't he finish it if he can do it?" Helm was asking. "I can't stand—"

He stopped, and the room became dead-silent. From below had come a series of vague sounds beyond recognition. Then in moments the click of the door opening, and the shuffling sound of slow steps, on the floor beneath, on the stair!

FARLEY felt his skin crawling as with Todd and all about them he gazed toward the door that like a magnet held their eyes. The steps came slowly nearer, louder, and the guards at the door stepped aside. The door opened. They saw Curtlin rising up through it, his face crimson, supporting a stumbling figure wrapped in a white sheet. And that figure—that dead-white face that had stared up at them from the dead body on the table minutes before—that man—

"My God, it's Kingley—Kingley!" cried Helm, his voice unrecognizable. "Kingley—living—"

"Todd—Todd, he's done it!" Farley yelled. The room was in wild uproar.

"I told you that I'd do it!" Curtlin's voice flared triumphantly. "The third one I've brought back—from the tomb!"

"The tomb?" said Kingley, his eyes staring, his voice thick. "But I haven't been—I haven't surely been—"

"Dead, and I've brought you back!" Curtlin cried. "Is there any of you who disbelieve now?" he challenged fiercely. "Todd, do you still believe it's all a plot? Do you want to ask Kingley whether he was dead or not?"

"I'd like to ask him something, yes!" Todd's voice stabbed.

"Go on, then!" cried Curtlin. Todd stepped to the swaying, white-wrapped man.

"Kingley, I want the answer to just one question. You were one of several men in this town who nine months ago told me your lives had been threatened. Did those threats have anything to do with all this?"

Kingley's thick tongue strove for utterance. "No, no, Todd—I found out later that the threats I told you about meant nothing. But I died—they say I've been dead—"

"There's your answer, Todd!" Curtlin cried. "The same answer Clay and Barton gave you, and it smashes your childish plot-theories!"

"On the contrary!" Todd said. "Those three answers from Clay and Barton and Kingley are all the proofs I need!"

"Proofs of what?" cried Curtlin.

"Proofs that these three men are not Clay and Barton and Kingley at all! No one ever told me of any threats and these three in remembering something they never told me have proved that they are not Clay and Barton and Kingley!"

"Clay and Barton and Kingley died just as everybody thought and these three men are their doubles—doubles prepared by Curtlin's art as a plastic surgeon! No, don't try it, Curtlin—"

Curtlin was quick, but before his gun was more than half out Todd had shot twice, from his pocket. Curtlin swayed, a red stain spreading on his white jacket, and slumped to the floor. Those in the crowded room stood petrified, transfixed.

Todd knelt beside Curtlin. Bloody foam was on the physician's lips, and a twisted smile. His breath came in choking gasps.

"You win, Todd—I underestimated you. Don't be—too hard on other three—I was moving spirit of the thing. You'll find—bodies of real Clay and Barton and Kingley hidden in laboratory—hid them

one by one as I brought their doubles out. What a joke—on me—that this ends—with—me—dead—"

His head rolled back. Todd straightened to face the three white-visaged men whom all had believed Clay and Barton and Kingley.

"You three are going to face conspiracy charges and maybe more," he said, and turned to the staring police-captain. "Take them out, the back way, before that crowd out there learns the truth."

"But Todd—!" Farley was choking. "How can they be doubles when we all recognized them—their friends and families recognized them—as Clay and Barton and Kingley?"

"It's simple enough," said Todd, to Farley and the spellbound men about them. "Curtlin was comparatively poor—you all knew that and commented on it. He was a brilliant plastic surgeon, as you informed me yourself, Farley, and as such could remold living faces at will. He decided to use his power in plastic surgery to bring himself millions.

"He started his plot two years ago with that address on the possibility of reviving life in dead tissues by ray-processes. Then he waited for his chance. It came between six and eight months ago when three of the richest men in this city, all millionaires, died. They were Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley.

"Curtlin had known all three by sight and he must have started out after their deaths to procure three unscrupulous accomplices who resembled Clay and Barton and Kingley in the unalterable features of height, head-shape, figure and hair and eye-coloring. Where he secured his three accomplices we won't know until they confess, but he probably found them willing enough when he showed what immense rewards they'd get.

"He brought them into this house unknown to any one, and probably with their help robbed the cemetery of the bodies of Clay and Barton and Kingley. Then began four months of arduous work for him, the remolding of the living faces of his accomplices into exact replicas of the faces of those three dead men. All his art as a plastic surgeon he must have used, working patiently on muscle and bone and tissue, altering expression by working with supporting muscles, changing the shapes of noses and ears, letting his work heal and then going on with it. Gradually in those four months he rebuilt the faces of the three into replicas of the faces of the three dead men, using those dead faces as his models!

"A few days ago his work was finished. His three accomplices were to all appearances exact replicas in face and figure of the three dead men. Curtlin without doubt had given them handwriting of the three dead men to practise copying, and had trained them to speak in the same voices as Clay and Barton and Kingley. He had equipped them too with a minute store of knowledge concerning the lives and friends of the three dead men so that they could pass as them in every particular.

"One thing he may not have foreseen was the dead-whiteness of their faces after the plastic surgery had healed, but that fitted in with Curtlin's plan well enough, for that whiteness would seem natural in men brought back from the dead. Curtlin was all ready therefore to set his plan to working.

"That plan was none other than to install his three accomplices in the identities of Clay and Barton and Kingley by explaining that he had raised them by his process from death! That would make the three the masters of the millions of the three dead men, and Curtlin in turn

by his hold over them would be master over all three. It was an incredibly daring plan, but it had every chance of succeeding. For even though many might not believe that he had actually revived the three from death, they would not question that the three really were Clay and Barton and Kingley. They would simply believe in that case that Clay and Barton and Kingley had never been dead at all.

"He began with Clay. He hid Clay's body as he said and then drove with the pseudo-Clay to the latter's home. His wife even believed that it was Clay, and knowing that her husband had really been dead she was terror-stricken. She called us, and though I was overwhelmed myself by the sight of Clay living I thought to ask that question about threats he had formerly reported to me. If he said that he didn't remember any such occurrence it could be Clay, but if he pretended to remember, it wasn't Clay but an imposter. He did pretend to remember, and I knew that though he was the image of Clay the man before me was not Clay.

"I still could hardly believe it, though. Farley and I learned that the bodies of Barton and Kingley had been taken also from the cemetery, and when we penetrated Curtlin's laboratory last night we found those bodies in it, with the elaborate apparatus he had faked in case any one entered the laboratory. The pseudo-Barton and pseudo-Kingley were probably then hiding in the upper floors of the house. Clay's body was not to be seen, for as he said, he had hidden it after the pseudo-Clay's first appearance.

"This morning came the news of Barton's return to life and we went out to see him. I tested him also. To all appearances he was Barton, the man we had seen dead hours before, but when I spoke of the threats I said he had told me of

before his death, he pretended to remember also and I knew that he also was an impostor. I began to understand Curtlin's game then, and I waited for him to stage a revival of Kingley too.

"He did it, here, and I was waiting to test Kingley, the last of the three, with the same question. You saw that he too pretended to remember something the real Kingley never said, and that was proof that all three were impostors and I confronted Curtlin with it. He saw the game was lost and in a mad access of hate drew his gun in an effort to kill me, and got killed himself.

"That's all there was to it. If those tests had not shown me that the three supposed returners from death were impostors, Curtlin's achievement would have been accepted as real. You all saw Kingley's dead body and then saw him bring up the pseudo-Kingley whom he had hidden down in the laboratory. And Curtlin would never have needed to repeat his supposed achievement, for he need only plead as he did that to continue it would wreck civilization. Whatever argument there was, no one would ever have questioned that his three accomplices were other than Clay and Barton and Kingley. He played for millions—played brilliantly—but he lost as even the

most brilliant must do when he plays from the wrong side of the board."

"Then it was all a fake—and it took us in!" cried one of the newspapermen, half dazedly. "But at that it's as big a story as if it were true!"

"One side, there!" cried others. "Let me at a telephone, will you?"

In a moment they were all struggling out of the door, and then a swelling roar of voices told that the crowd outside was learning the truth.

Farley faced Todd, still dumfounded. "Todd, when I think that we all stepped right into Curtlin's deceptions and then bawled you out for not following us—"

"Forget it, Farley," the other advised. "It's fifty-fifty—I didn't like to hold out on you but didn't want Curtlin to know I was nearing the truth."

"And to think that Clay and Barton and Kingley remained dead and in this house through it all!" the reporter marvelled.

Todd nodded gravely. "We'll find their bodies hidden down there in the laboratory, and their families can give them another funeral or not as they see fit. Dead through it all—yes, they were the real three from the tomb, and they're going back there to stay."

