

10¢

DIME



MYSTERY

JULY

MAGAZINE

THE WEREWOLF OF WALL STREET

A SMASHING STORY

OF
EERIE MYSTERY
AND TERROR

by
EDITH &
EJLER
JACOBSON



GODDESS OF THE
HALF-WORLD BROOD

by HENRY T. SPERRY

10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE



Volume Seventeen

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Number Four

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT-FICTION!

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The Werewolf of Wall Street

By EDITH and EJLER JACOBSON

I saw the ghastly man-thing fresh from his feast of blood, and I knew that if ever again I hoped to see Terry Ramsay, the beautiful girl I loved, I must follow the monster to his resting place—that Limbo where ghouls hold awful revelry in the grisly hours of the night.





A pulse-stirring mystery novel of a ghastly thirst that could be quenched by neither water nor wine!

CHAPTER ONE

The Monster Strikes

IT WAS a hot August, and I was driving a bakery truck. I got the job in June, when I was graduated from college. On the hottest afternoon of them all, I parked the doughnut truck on Wall Street, and went up to the air-cooled offices of Wallace, Brown and Gaines to

inquire about my investments in Standard Cereals of America.

Now, I'd been sitting in the open cab of my big bus since eight that morning, and I was wet and grimy; but I didn't look anywhere near as bad as the boys in the office building. Just one more degree rise in temperature would have turned them liquid. They can't take it, I thought with fine scorn, as I asked to see Chet Wallace, head of the firm.

"Your father's been expecting you," said a weary-eyed switchboard girl. "Hot enough for you, Ronnie?"

I nodded briefly, and went into the huge cool inner office where Dad, who looked about as near melting as the Em-

pire State, sat behind the big mahogany desk with a white handkerchief carefully tucked into his breast-pocket.

"You look like a bruiser," Dad said appreciatively. "If I didn't know better, I'd say your family had been driving trucks since the Civil War."

I stretched my bare arms. That air-conditioning felt good. "Driving trucks doesn't support a wife," I told him. "And it's a wife I'm after. Terry Ramsay, to be exact. So I came to ask you about that hundred shares of Standard Cereal I bought last year."

A startling change came over Dad's face. That doesn't happen often, and when it does, it means something's up. "Your stocks have gone crazy," he said tersely, "along with everybody else's stocks." He was silent for a minute, looking at me as though I were a business proposition, which surprised me. I'd never been that to Dad. Even after I got out of school, with his millions behind and ahead of me, he'd refused to give me a job in the firm. Chet Wallace just wasn't the kind who'd have even his own son grubbing on him.

"Ronnie," he said as last, in a flat, heavy voice, "I'm thinking you're just what I need around here. You look like a man, which is more than I can say about anyone I've had business with for a long time. For your information, the market is practically on the verge of collapse. And there's no reason for it, except that people have gone wild. Wild and panicky, and I can't tell you why. Take that ass Harry Gaines, for instance—my own partner—bought two hundred shares of Atlantic Copper three days after the newspapers announced that Atlantic was going into bankruptcy. He's crazy—dangerously crazy! All over the country, these fools are playing hopscotch with the nation's finances! And I can't handle 'em, Ronnie. Maybe—if I took you into the firm—you could check up on what's going on."

For a minute, I thought one or the

other of us had gone queer with the heat. Understand, for twenty-two years, I'd been brought up to think that my father's position was none of my business, that I'd have to make my own way up. I felt the way any kid truck-driver would have felt if a big-time financier had offered him a big-time job. Just—floored by the luck of it.

I guess I enthused pretty incoherently, because Dad's heavy lips went grim, and he said, "It's not going to be fun. That's not why I want you. There's something damned wrong around here, and nobody in the Street can find out what it is, Maybe an outsider, a hard-handed day laborer like yourself, can get to the bottom of it. I can't. Exhibit A will be Harry Gaines. He's what you're supposed to bring around. Do it, and I'll buy you a seat on the Stock Exchange for a wedding present."

Bringing Harry Gaines around didn't sound like a tough assignment. I'd known him since I was a frosh at college. A thin, likeable, high-strung cuss who'd kidded me unmercifully about my attachment for his wife's sister—and then slipped me a twenty to take her out, when my allowance ran short.

And then—Harry Gaines came into the office. I stopped feeling enthusiastic, and there was nothing in me but a queer spontaneous sickness, not unlike the queaziness I'd had a year before, when I stepped onto the mat for the intercollegiate wrestling finals.

Because Harry looked like the ungodliest job I'd ever tackled.

"I'M TAKING young Ronnie into the firm," my Dad said in a tight voice. "He'll have the other desk in your office. We need new blood in this outfit."

Gaines was considerably leaner than I remembered him, shoulders sagging with sheer emaciation, his narrow face white and taut as though he'd been digging

ditches all day in the August heat instead of sitting in an air-cooled office. He answered in a weary monotone. "New blood, Chet? Yes. We need—new blood."

He barely looked at me, but there was something just not *right* about the way he said it. "New blood." He thinks I'm a kid. I told myself angrily, Chet Wallace's kid, and nothing more. I'll show him, yet But what I really felt was—half-sick.

"Mind—if I take some water, Chet?" the lean man continued. "Parched—in this heat."

I stared at him as he drank cupful after cupful from the water-cooler, till I thought he'd burst. Dad started saying something about Atlantic Copper, and Harry went on drinking, as though he didn't understand. At last, he finished with a gurgle, and shambled toward me, extending a bony hand.

I shook it—and dropped it hurriedly. The white hand was like ice. Actually cold and dry as that, not like any other human hand you'd touch in a New York August, unless—you happened to be in the City Morgue.

I turned to Dad, when Harry left, and said, "He's sick, Dad. He's the sickest guy I ever saw standing on two feet."

"Sick or crazy," Dad dismissed it simply, "Or both."

But it didn't seem as simple as that to me. I'd been hired to get a more comprehensive answer. Suddenly I remembered all the tired-looking people in the outer office, and I thought, they looked that way because they've been trying to find out. The scientifically air-cooled offices of Wallace, Brown and Gaines was thick with an intangible hopelessness. I got out, in a hurry, into the comparative normality of ninety degrees in the cab of my doughnut truck.

I knew Dad was having company for dinner that evening. Very private company—Sandra Howard, in fact. So I

picked up dinner somewhere in the Village, and then continued uptown to Terry Ramsay's place. I had a lot to tell Terry that night.

If I put her onto it, would she coax her sister Marcia to take Harry away for a few weeks' vacation? If she didn't, I had the darndest feeling that the Ramsay père and mère would be burying a son-in-law before they acquired a new one. God, how I wished Harry would leave town! For his own sake—and for ours. Even then, with nothing to go by but that persistent queaziness at the pit of my stomach, I felt more than a little uncomfortable at the thought of Harry. It wasn't something ordinary he'd picked up, I thought, like a cold or the mumps—it was a disease without a name.

And Terry—she was fair as an angel, and just as good. But the remote, troubled look in her grey eyes when she met me at the door—that was something new.

"Ronnie," she told me, her warm voice just a little strained, a little harsh, "I'm standing you up tonight. You'll have to excuse it."

"Terry, what's the matter?" I asked sharply. I felt a momentary pang of jealousy—and then I realized from the expression on her face that she wasn't breaking this date because she *wanted* to. It wasn't anything as simple as another man in her life. She seemed worried, frightened, and as alone as I've ever seen a girl look.

Well, she hadn't any right to look so alone! I was there, wasn't I? I guess she saw the way I felt, because her lower lip trembled, and she slipped into my arms, clinging to me as though I were her salvation. That didn't make me feel much better, because I still didn't know what the matter was.

"**R**ONNIE darling, have you—have you seen Harry?" she whispered. "I—don't know what it is, but Marcia—"

I promised to go to Marcia's tonight. I must go. She needs me."

Marcia *needs* me. Still only a partial explanation. Later, I was going to curse myself for an inhuman beast, remembering how I thought, then, that even future in-laws were a bother.

"Yes, I've seen Harry," I told her coldly.

"Then," she whispered, "you know almost as much as I do."

The look on her face would have melted a rock, and I wasn't a rock. I didn't even mind that *almost*. "You can't go there alone," I told her. "If you're in trouble, I'm in trouble too. That's how we are, Terry."

I felt like a dog, seeing that gratitude and love in Terry's eyes, and knowing I didn't deserve it the least little bit. As though it weren't my primary business to be beside her when she needed me

We were sitting in the roadster I'd been given for graduation with my arm around her. It was much cooler driving than a bakery truck. That angel-fair face was warm against my cheek, as I told her cheerfully that my truck-driving days were over, and here I'd just march in tonight and give Harry a good lecture, bring him to his senses, and thus earn my seat on the Exchange.

". . . and we'll all be happy ever after," I concluded, though that queaziness in my stomach was acting up again, "if you just trust Ronnie the giant-killer." That made her smile.

She smiled, and I smiled back, and all the time, I half-sensed the nightmare that was to come

There was no answer to our ring at Marcia's apartment. Terry looked at me anxiously, and pulled a latchkey from her purse. I don't like breaking in on people, even your future sisters-in-law, so I rang again. This time there *was* an answer.

"Aa-ouw!" The scream rose icily, clearly, broke on a note that I heard with

my spine rather than my ears. I shouted, "My God!" and pushed Terry away as I took the key from her. She wasn't going in there, not while I could help it!

No lights, I stumbled through the living-room to a lamp. The room was empty, and undisturbed. I shouted, "Marcia! Marica, are you hurt?"

A thud sounded beyond the bedroom door. I burst in, snapping on the wall switch as I went. The first thing I saw was—a white rag of a face, snarling at me from outside the bedroom window. Words shrieked through my brain; *Skin doesn't look like that*. Human beings don't have twitching purplish eyes, and thin liver-colored lips curled back on—*red* teeth!

I stepped toward it—and stumbled over something softly solid on the floor. When I looked again, the face was gone. And when I looked at the thing that had tripped me, I guess my own face stopped being a thing not good to see.

My hands were wet and cold with a sweat that had nothing to do with summer heat, and my mouth was dry and soundless as a desert.

That *face* through the window—I could have sworn it, though I couldn't have sworn to my own sanity—had belonged to Harry Gaines.

And inert—a twisted thing on the floor—lay the body of his wife, Marcia.

Her thin nightdress lay in shreds over her body. Under the tatters, pulsing in tempo with the aorta, blood oozed down her white side, forming a widening, dark stain on the carpet. I picked the girl up, and blood smeared my linen suit, covered my hands.

I soaked every towel in the bathroom, and tried to wipe the blood away. It was after the towels had been changed three times, after I'd called a doctor, that my stomach began to churn in revolt.

As soon as I relaxed for a moment all

the horribleness of it crashed home to me.

Marcia's right cheek was gone. It had been gnawed away, as though by rats. Long strips had been torn from her throat, and there was no tip on her right breast. Here some mad Shylock had claimed his pound of flesh. Then blood had filled the wounds again.

The woman on the bed stirred. She was staring at me now, eyes wide, lips parted in an unvoiced wail of intolerable pain that was turned into a gurgle by the rush of blood.

"Take my hand," I told her, in an agony of helplessness. "Squeeze it hard—that helps, sometimes."

Her finger-nails dug into my wet palms, her eyelids dropped, and a scream started through her tattered throat. There were words scattered through the piteous sounds . . . "Harry! No . . . my God! It can't . . . be . . . Harry . . .!" Harry. Her husband, the lean likeable fellow who had become a devil—a monster. He had done this to her.

I'd seen his face at the window, and then it was gone. There was a fire escape, and Harry Gaines was free. *Terry!* Terry was outside, alone. I threw a sheet over Marcia's poor white body, and stumbled out.

There was a doctor in the corridor, walking toward the apartment with an elevator man. But of a girl with grey eyes, fair as a Botticelli angel, there was no sign anywhere.

CHAPTER TWO

Another Tryst With Death

I SHOUTED at the doctor to go inside, and collared the elevator man. No, he hadn't seen Terry go out . . . but then, he'd just come on duty.

No Terry. No Terry anywhere. I called at her home, asked futilely for her, and shouted at her mother and father

with unconscious cruelty that they'd better get over to Marcia's. I went back to Marcia's myself, pounding up and down the staircase of the apartment house. I shouted Terry's name till a cop came out of Marcia's door and told me to shut up.

The cops—God, how I needed them now! But even in the crazy panic that rode me that night, I realized that it was *I* who'd been seen coming out of the butchered woman's apartment—I who was covered now with her blood—I whose finger-prints were all over her place. I hadn't time to explain to the law. It was more important to find Terry. I beat it down the staircase and got to a corner drug-store in a matter of seconds.

"Dad," I called into a pay-phone. "I don't care what you're doing, but stop doing it. Terry's gone, and I think Harry's got her." I gave him a brief outline of what I'd seen in Marcia's apartment. "Dad, I can't report her missing when she's only been out of my sight for an hour. In fact, I don't dare go near a cop. But you've got drag. You can make 'em look for her right now, if you want to."

"Steady, son," he cautioned me. "Sure. I'll get them after her. And you come home. You'll be better off here."

I wasn't going to be better off anywhere but where Terry was, but there wasn't much sense in saying so. If I didn't get away, soon, the law would see to it that I wasn't even free to look for her. So I went home . . .

SANDRA HOWARD, looking like a sophisticated schoolgirl in spite of her two marriages and her grown-up daughter, was perched there on the sun-parlor settee. She screamed when she saw the blood which covered me. Dad patted her shoulder with the half-condescending affection he'd shown her always, and said to me, "You'd better change your suit, Ronnie. And take a shower, too. You look like a butcher."

"Terry," I pleaded with him. "You called the cops about Terry?"

Dad nodded, slowly. Sandra started to weep, softly, and Dad talked to her the way you'd talk to a child. He had the fondness for her that big men always have for people they've been kind to. Since Sandra had cracked up in that motor accident a year ago, and Dad had come forward as a blood donor to save her life, she'd been a pretty constant visitor at our quarters.

He snapped her out of it quickly enough, and she grew tearfully maternal toward me. "It's—just so terrible to hear all this, Ronnie, and to see you—looking that way." There was something brave about her, as though she sensed an imminent peril that would warp all our lives. "I'm getting you a drink," she told me firmly.

It was the most sensible thing anyone could have done for me at that point. I gulped it down with a gasp.

A respectful face, full as the moon, showed itself at the door.

"Mr. Brown, your partner, to see you, sir," announced Jason, our butler, and then Dad shooed me into my own room to clean up.

I did as good a job as I could, but my finger-nails were still dark with clots of Marcia's life-blood. Maybe Sandra knew a way to clean them—women often did—

I paused in the doorway, because it was useless to ask Sandra anything any more. She looked—panic-stricken, half-mad with fear. And Bob Brown, standing between her and my father, wasn't at all the full-bodied man I'd met six months earlier. He was a ghost of a man, an emaciated wreck with a white face and feverish twitching eyelids. He was *sick*—in the same ungodly way Harry Gaines had been sick.

"Get the hell out, Bob," Dad's voice rumbled. "I said, *Get the hell out!*"

Sandra's small nervous hands caught

Dad's wrist, stopping a sure blow at the sick man. "I'll go with him," she whispered. "I've *got* to go, Chet—maybe there's a reason"

And then, she reached for her purse. Even as Dad cried after her, she was gone. Out into the night . . . holding to the reedy arm of a man who was evilly sick.

Dad stood there, tense and white. He was impotent with rage. "Dad, I'm following them," I shouted.

"I'm coming with you," he said. "My God, she didn't *want* to go"

I was out the front door as I shouted back to him, "You stay where you are, They may phone you back—about Terry."

I THOUGHT I saw Sandra's silver-blond head through the rear window of a cab that was waiting for a red light to change, and that was good enough lead to follow. I raced my car down Park Avenue after the cab, lost it in traffic, and found it again at Union Square. I was following the wildest of hunches, but then, everything that happened was wild, and unbelievably horrible.

First, Terry had been frightened, and she had gone someplace she didn't *want* to go—because of a sick man, Harry Gaines. Now, another sick man had turned up, and summoned another woman who was obviously panic-stricken at the thought of accompanying him. Somehow, I felt Bob Brown and Sandra might lead me to Terry. Bob was stricken by the same disease that cursed Harry Gaines. I had to stick to him—he was my only clue!

If there'd only been time—if I'd only had a breathing spell in which to convince the cops about seeing Harry's wild face at the window—I might have had allies in my search. Now, there wasn't time, and I had to handle it alone

Terry. God, I prayed, don't let me lose track of that cab again *down-*

town. Why were we going downtown? Brown didn't live downtown, I knew, and neither did Sandra. Nor was it likely that either of them knew a soul south of Fourteenth Street. They weren't that kind of people. That cabbie was some driver—he shot through a light at Astor place, and I was stopped for trying the same thing.

I don't think I heard a word the traffic cop bawled at me. I was in a fever of impatience to get going . . . and when I realized that the bawling-out was likely to take some time, I stepped on the gas, and while a whistle shrilled imperatively behind me, I did some fancy stretching with the New York City speed limit.

It was gone. It might take me all night or all year to locate that cab again in the maze of little alleys that make up old Manhattan.

But—this was familiar territory. I'd covered it the day before in my bakery truck . . . and then I knew where Brown was going with Sandra, the one possible place they could go in that part of town. It was insane, at this hour, for anything to be going on there, but something was going on—in the Street. In Wall Street, after hours.

Terry. Terry with her grey eyes and angel's face No, there wasn't a sign of an angel's face on the deserted alley that by day was the richest little lane in the world. For at night the skyscrapers are dark, their doors locked, and from the areaways come the drunks, the derelicts, and all the spawn of the waterfront nearby.

No window of all those thousands was lit. Brown—Sandra—Terry—where in God's name were they? Or was this darkness hiding them?

I saw a girl walking slowly ahead of me, a girl I hadn't noticed before. There was something oddly familiar about her gait . . . I ran to her, and she turned.

The dark face, garish with cheap cos-

metic, assumed a tired smile. She said, "Hello, Mister," and stood still. So did I. Damn you, I told myself, this is one case where you *don't* say, Haven't I seen you before. But it was exactly what I wanted to say, even while I knew that I couldn't possibly have known a woman like that at any point of my life.

The girl shifted to her right hip. "Well?" she said. There was an odor of perfume coming from her, and it wasn't five-and-dime stuff either. I stepped back, involuntarily. She shrugged her shoulders, and walked on.

Maybe it was because she was the only living thing that I could see. I was up against a stone wall. Anyway, I followed her. I had to do *something!*

I pussy-footed close behind her, keeping as much in the shadows as she did. Once I had to step aside, into the gutter, because the pavement was too narrow for me to side-step a swaying drunken sailor who barred my path.

She was going toward the building—our building. The entrance was barred and padlocked, but she had a key to the gate. I ran now, not caring how noisily my heels thudded.

IT MISSED me by inches, breezing against my face with a harsh whoosh, and then it hit the pavement with a dull crack. I looked at the thing that had come from the window, and important small matters like nerves and blood-vessels stopped working inside me.

In a smear of broken flesh and trickling blood, it lay on the pavement, face up. That face might have been lovely once—I didn't know. It was a young girl and she was stark naked. I didn't know whether she had jumped, fallen, or been pushed to her death. I didn't know who she was, or why she should have been in that darkened building.

The barred gate opened again, and shadowy images emerged, with a far from

shadowy speed. I recognized the girl who had accosted me earlier, saw two others stoop to the thing on the sidewalk.

Whatever, whoever they were, they hadn't any business there. I sailed into them tooth and nail, only to be repulsed by what I touched. I tell you, it wasn't human flesh that my fists pounded—too cold for that. It was the icy cold of death. These creatures weren't *alive!* They faded away like mist before me, and I was alone in the deserted street. The body of the girl was gore. I heard the click of the closing gate.

I rattled at the padlock, shouting hoarse vain threats. A dim procession was vanishing down the corridor, toward the elevators, but there was steel between us.

Out of the echoes of my own cries and of those ghostly footsteps thudding on bare stone, came a dim call. My own name. "Ronn—" It was cut off, muffled in mid-air. But I knew it. Knew that voice as I knew that I was alive.

It had been Terry Ramsay, calling to me from the shadows, out of unspeakable and unknown hell, with cold relentless steel between us.

I was clinging to that gate, shouting at the things within, when something hard struck me between the shoulder-blades. There was a cop behind me, the third to take a dislike to me that night, and this one seemed ready to do something about it.

Some remnant of reason warned me that he was the wrong person on whom to resume wrestling practice, much as I felt like it. "What you think you're doin'?" he asked, collaring me intolerantly. "Better make it good, brother. . . ."

I tried to shake him off, but I couldn't. This time, I had to explain. "A girl," I told him. "She jumped out of the window, and they took her inside . . . get me in there, officer, for God's sake!" It was all I dared say. If I'd told him that I was

trailing the second woman to disappear that night in the vicinity of a man namelessly sick, I'd have had to identify myself as the man who found Marcia's butchered body. That might mean months of proving to a jury that I wasn't a murderer.

And I didn't have months! I didn't have—minutes to spare. "I've got to go inside!" I shouted at the officer again.

He gave me an odd look, wavering between credence and disbelief, but with the balance all on the side of disbelief. God, if he were going to do something, why couldn't he do it in a hurry! He sniffed at my breath, while I cursed silently, and then rapped his nightstick against the gate. A sleepy-eyed watchman shambled up to us from the shadows, and inquired, "Wha's going on?"

"This guy says he saw a girl jump out of a window in this building," said the officer. "He says somebody came and picked up the body and took it back inside. Seen anything like that, Pop?"

The watchman sniggered, a senile stupid snigger that made me want to kill him. He sounded so sleepy, I was sure he'd been doped. "He's dreamin', orfisser. I oughta know what goes on here. Been here every night for twelve years, and ain't seen a girl yet. Wouldn't be so bad, at that."

"Thanks, Pop," said the officer. To me, he added, "You've had a snifter, haven't you? Say, do you think I ought to take you to the precinct or the nut-house?"

"Make it the nut-house," haw-hawed the watchman.

I saw red. Dammit, a girl had *died* here, five minutes earlier, and they were laughing . . . a girl had died, and another girl might die, if I didn't find a way of getting to her. I slipped out of my jacket, let the copper have one on the chin as he came after me, and tried to take myself elsewhere. Instantly, the Street was loud with whistles, alive with blue-coats, and I

knew in a kind of hopeless agony that I wasn't going farther without police escort.

Dad came down to the police station as soon as I called him; but by the time he got me and my roadster out of hock, having convinced the Department that I'd been a good son and a good citizen all my life, it was almost dawn.

Dawn—for everyone else in the world. For me, it might mean only the day of judgment. Because I had been too late the night before. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

They Have no Blood!

“SON, forgive me.” That was all my father said, sitting heavily beside me in the roadster. He looked old somehow, and the white breast-pocket handkerchief was crushed and crumpled. Over the darkness, grey visibility crept from the east; there was a hot wind blowing from the sea.

“Why, Dad?” I asked.

“I've gotten you into a hell of a mess, wishing that job on you—maybe a murder rap. But I'll stand behind you. . . .”

That wasn't what bothered me. Dully, like a clock tolling in purgatory, Terry's name went through my head. “Dad,” I said, “got a key to your own office? I've got to get in there—got to find her!”

“You mean Terry?” he asked. “Terry's all right—thank God. At least I can give you that much good news. Sandra called me a little after one, last night, and said she was home. Brown had taken her—down to the aquarium. Said he was going to introduce her to the fishes. Crazy. Like all the rest. She gave him the slip.

“She found Terry at her own place when she got home. Her own daughter, Maxie, met Terry in a bad nervous state outside Marcia's corridor. They live quite near each other, you know. Maxie made Terry come home with her.”

I yelled, “I'm going to her. Right now.”

Dad said, “I wouldn't do that, son. Sandra said Terry doesn't want to see you—just yet. She's under some kind of misapprehension—thinks it was you who butchered Marcia. Sandra used to be some kind of nurse—she's keeping Terry quiet for the time being. Says the child's not in a state where she ought to see anyone. Says the only reason Terry hasn't informed on you, is that she's prostrated with the shock of it.”

“But, Dad—” No, I couldn't believe that. Terry to think me a butcher? How had she found out, between the time I'd gone into Marcia's apartment, and the time I found her gone? No, she'd been out there till she left, where she could see nothing . . . but what if she *had* seen, had slipped in past me somehow? Wasn't that evil suspicion exactly what I'd feared would come into every mind?

“Sandra believes in you, Ronnie,” Dad went on. “She won't let Terry talk till the girl's calmer . . . and the whole Ramsay family's too upset about Marcia to mind leaving Terry in capable hands. If you'll just sit tight, son . . .”

Sit tight? After the previous night's horror, a kind of numbness had come over my brain. Everything had been too incredible, too beyond belief—was it my senses that had gone mad, and not the outside world? I half-believed that. I tried to tell Dad.

“It doesn't make sense,” he sighed. “Harry Gaines mutilating his own wife—I'm taking your word for that, Ronnie—girls plopping out my office window at midnight. Maybe the watchman was right. Maybe you dreamt it, Ronnie.”

“Maybe I did,” I echoed. If Terry hated me—didn't want to see me—anything was possible.

“The healthiest thing for you to do,” Dad advised, “is to go back to the office, and wait. We'll keep our mouths shut about this—till something breaks. I'm going to see Harriet Brown, Bob's wife.

Poor woman—she was sweet to me when your mother died, Ronnie. I'm thinking she might need a man around the house. If anything happens, get in touch with Sandra. She can be trusted."

Sandra could be trusted? I supposed so. I began to feel that I couldn't be trusted. "It was pretty brave of her to go out with Brown," Dad said. "Brave—and damned foolish. She thought she might find something—for your sake, Ronnie."

Suddenly I felt that the thing wasn't over. One girl had died, and a woman was probably dying right now. And the sick men were still at large. "Dad," I said, "you'd better go to Sandra's. I'm—scared for her. Scared for every female in this town."

Dad shook his head. We had come back to the Street, and the sun was a big orange ball over the East River. "I'm leaving you here," he said. "I've got to get to Harriet Brown's."

He borrowed the roadster, and went off. There was a faint dark stain in front of our building, a stain that had evidently been rubbed almost out. Today, hundreds of unconscious passers-by would tread that stain, thinking of it, if they thought of it at all, as part and parcel of the city's untraceable muck.

But to me, it was unholy proof that I hadn't been dreaming the night before—that stain was a young girl's life-blood!

NO ONE had arrived at the office when I came in. Dad had given me the keys to every office and room, and I investigated each one. Even the woman's wash-room, where I had no business at all. And it was there, unmistakable, faint, and lingering, that I caught the scent of perfume. That perfume which had come from the girl who accosted me the night before, and whom I felt I should have known, but didn't.

She'd been here, all right! But she

wasn't here now—she was in the limbo where devils dwell in the daytime. I ran back to my phone, and dialed Sandra's number. I listened to the buzzing signal for what seemed a lifetime. "Sorry, they do not answer," said the operator.

And then I was sure that they were trapped! When I saw them again, they might be broken corpses . . . but, God, what could I do?

The memory of Dad's heavy voice came to me. "Sit tight." And I sat tight. Had to. The phone was ringing, and after I answered it, it kept ringing with scarcely a pause. I had come to work early, on the day of the biggest crash since '29.

It was a hot job to handle alone, that August day when the bottom dropped out of the market. I sat at my phone, collar open, shirt soaked, jacket draped over a hat-tree, and I sold. God, how I sold—when I could find a buyer, which wasn't often.

There was the slimmest of reasons for it. It was pandemonium dropped without warning. Oh, there'd been war scare, and drought in the west—but it hadn't been enough to make the market insane, not in this way!

Somewhere in the back of my brain a thought persisted, and if I'd only had time to examine it, it might have clicked. First, there had been the panic's shadow—Dad shouting that the brokers had gone crazy. Then the panic *within*—with men like Gaines and Brown going horribly sick, with revolting death gripping the Street, and those connected with the Street. And now—the panic in full force. It was as though that hidden underworld which skulked through the Street by night had come into the sun, blasting our lives by day. . . .

"Ronnie. Need help—? I'll—dive right in."

I turned to see who had spoken, and a mad rush of anger made me tremble. Standing there, pale and sick, but with a

good shave and a shine on his shoes, was Harry Gaines!

I dropped the phone I'd been holding, and screamed, "You've got Terry, you dirty murderer! You can't do to her what you did to Marcia! I'll kill you for it!"

The eyelids jerked into a mild surprised "Marcia—poor Marcia! Someone—hurt her last night."

"Hurt her! I'll say someone hurt her! And I saw you outside her window!"

The leer didn't go from that white face, but Harry retreated, as though he were afraid of me. "And I saw you," he murmured. "It—wouldn't be funny—to tell police I was in my own apartment. They—expect that. I live there. But you—have fingerprints all over—that don't belong. All over Marcia's body . . . I could tell them something, too."

My arm dropped to my side. I knew, as I had known all morning, how the damnably guilty feel. I mumbled, "But Terry . . . ?"

"I don't know," said the trembling husk of a man. His eyes avoided mine, and he slunk to his desk. The phone was ringing again.

It was later, and hotter, and financially bleaker, before I had time to notice what Harry Gaines had been doing with the phone on his own desk. And when I did notice, I went rabid. He was—*buying*. As fast as I sold, Harry was buying up again. It wasn't gambling, either. It was suicide! I opened my mouth to call him an unprintable name—and my jaw just wobbled there, in mid-air.

BECAUSE, while he'd been sitting, there, while the morning had waned to afternoon, Harry's face had turned white as chalk . . . and his eyes were purplish, and his liver-colored lips were a thin gash in a rag face. It was the face I had seen snarling from Marcia's window!

"You've—cancelled my orders all—day, Ronnie," came from the unspeakably

vile visage, words croaked as the unresting dead might croak them. "Maybe—I'll die for it."

"You're damned right, you'll die!" I howled at him. "You're half-dead already!"

"I'll die of thirst," he croaked on. "Thirst that water can't slake, nor wine—unless *you* save me, Ronnie." His thin lips barely breathed forth the words. "You'll *want* to save me—because if I die, Terry is going to die with me!"

His words trickled down my spine like separate drops of frozen air. I wanted to kill him . . . and I tried to. I tore into that icy thin body, and when I'd stopped shaking him, he could hardly stand.

His lip was split, and something trickled over his chin from the gash. It was as weak and thin as water! *And that was what Harry had in his veins!*

Blood. That's what had been the matter with them. With Harry and Bob, and God knows how many others. They had no blood.

"You'd better not hurt me," he whimpered from a corner. "You'd better come with me tonight. They'll kill Terry if you don't come with me."

I clutched at the skinny throat. "Don't make a sound," I warned him, trying not to go berserk. "If you tell me where Terry is, I'll go there with you—today."

His eyes popped, and he shook his throat for air. "There isn't any place to go by day. We'll have to wait—for tonight."

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered.

There was something else he had to tell me. Something that had been bothering me for hours. "Terry said if I'd seen you, I knew almost as much as she did," I told him. "What did she mean by *almost?*"

His lips were drawn back, and he grinned like a corpse. "Maybe—Marcia told her—that I hadn't been home at

night—for weeks. Marcia tried to stop me—tried to keep me from getting to the fresh blood. So I tore at her with my hands . . . I had to make her leave me alone!”

I shuddered at that hideous confession. For there had been a time when Harry loved Marcia. I relaxed my hold on his wrinkled throat.

I believed that something would happen to Terry if I didn't go with Harry tonight. I'd seen what had happened to the others, and I knew that only the most deadly compulsion could have driven Harry to *buy* stocks on a day like this.

He was too weak to talk any more, though he tried. I brought glass after glass of water to him, kept everyone else out of the office. My hot hands froze every time they grazed his face. He grew paler and his tongue began to hang out. His skin turned gray. . . . “You've got to last till tonight!” I pleaded with him. And he took the water, and let it trickle over his gaping mouth and swollen tongue, and there was agony in his eyes. His mouth was too swollen even for a whisper.

It got to be six, and then six-thirty. I brought Harry five cupfuls in three minutes. I'd forgotten what I was supposed to be in the office for . . .

Harry's purplish eyes stared up at me. When I poured the water over him, he didn't even try to swallow it.

Harry was dead.

And his death might mean—Terry's death! I had to get to that place which didn't exist by day, and which Harry had been too far gone to name. I phoned Dad, told him I'd be working late.

Somewhere during the night that had passed, it seemed to me that sheer outraged instinct had caused me to draw back when the gates to hell were open. At one point, I had done the thing which dropped that steel gate between Terry's hiding place and me.

The girl with the faint perfume. She had asked me to accompany her, and I had not gone. Well, I thought frantically, tonight she may walk again. And if she does—I'll walk with her.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Feast of Bloodless Men

Dark came, and the myriad workers were gone from the end of Manhattan Island. Gone uptown, gone to Harlem, to Brooklyn; gone to hot dinners, and comfortable chairs, and laughing children. Nothing that was alive lingered on the deserted street. My footsteps echoed hollowly through the black chasm of stone. . . .

And then there were more footsteps. From behind me came the girl with the painted face. She paused, raised her eyebrows at me. “Back again, Mister?”

Evil? She was evil as the first sin in Eden, and I wanted to run from her with every instinct of my body. But the odor of her perfume persisted, faint and lingering, as it had been in the washroom that morning, and certainties in the back of my head grew stronger.

I said what I'd half-meant to say the night before. “Haven't we met before somewhere?”

She shrugged. “Perhaps. I meet so many people. . . . Walk?” She cocked her arm, and I realized that I was supposed to take it. . . .

We passed the building where I worked, the building she'd disappeared into the night before. That wasn't odd, but I didn't dare call attention to the fact. Perhaps they changed the scene of their operations, for safety's sake.

In front of the Hines Building, with the offices of Hines and Carter occupying the first three floors, my guide stopped. “Like to drop in a while?” she asked. “We could have—fun.”

"Yes," I answered, doubling my hands into fists, to keep from gripping her throat. "Lots of fun."

She smiled and from her handbag she drew a key-chain, and opened the iron gates. This time I was going in, thank God!

"Nobody uses these buildings at night," she explained in the dim elevator she operated herself. "Pity to let all this nice space go to waste, isn't it? When you and I could be so happy—well, it makes a good spot to entertain my men friends."

"Very clever," I admitted. Dammit. I *had* seen her before! But where, I didn't know.

At the third floor, she led me into the customers' room of Hines and Carter. There were bottles and a bowl of ice, and glasses, on one of the tables. "Drink?" she asked, stroking my arm in a caress that made me go hot and cold with revulsion.

I had to humor her. I drank . . . and then suddenly the girl seemed to be dancing a crazy jig, her head floating off somewhere, yards away from her body. The room was coming apart, too. . . .

Thoughts circled upward, out of my head, in a kind of humming jargon. I'm doped, the words sang in my ears, and then everything was black.

I COULDN'T move my hands. It was bothering me. I could feel them, but I couldn't move them. I said so, aloud, and someone laughed.

I opened my eyes, to find myself sagging in a swivel chair, in a private office. I sat quite still, for the good reason that I was tied hand and foot. A door was open ahead of me, and in the dim lighting of that customers' room beyond, grotesque shapes swirled and danced.

"How do you like it, Ronnie?" asked a clear feminine voice. I turned my head. Standing beside me, her lovely little-girl

face twisted into amusement, was Sandra Howard.

I tried to cry out, and words came in a whisper, "Sandra, you're—"

"At the bottom of all this?" she finished for me. "Why, of course. Didn't you suspect, Ronnie?"

No, I admitted hopelessly to myself, I hadn't suspected. And I should have! God, I should have! That phony-sounding story about Brown taking her to the aquarium, about Terry being at her place. God, what had she done with Terry! I tried to shout that name at her, but it came from my lips in a whisper. That's funny, I thought, I was a good shouter in my truck-driving days.

"There she is," Sandra pointed. My eyes were growing used to the dim light in the room beyond. There were faces and bodies where only shadows had been before. There was Young Carter, who was boss in this office by day, his face pasty and thin and hideous in the dimness, and there was a girl with him . . . twisting her limbs about him, her hands caressing him all over his naked body.

And there were at least a dozen others, bloodless and perverted. A saturnalia among corpses . . . then a scream drooled from my lips.

Nude and unconscious and defenceless, stretched on a table in the midst of that ungodly reveling, was Terry! They weren't touching her now—but had they? Or would they?

I called Sandra the vilest name a man can call a woman, and she patted my cheek with mock-maternalism. "You're weak, Ronnie," she said. "I had to take so much blood from you—to keep my men in there alive. Odd, how much they trust me. They're all doomed—doomed to die of leukemia. There isn't a doctor in the world who knows a cure for it. They aren't capable of manufacturing blood in their bodies any more, so they come to me—for transfusions from

healthy bodies like yours. Poor fools, they think I'm keeping them alive. I hope their delusions make them happy."

I whispered, through teeth that clicked together strangely, "You gave it to them. You took their blood . . . and they're dying."

Sandra nodded, as though pleased with my perspicacity. A girl walked toward her, a girl who had not joined the incredible revels. It was my guide with the garish make-up and the fine perfume. Then I knew her—and cursed myself impotently for not having known her before. She was Maxine Howard, Sandra's daughter. "Nice work," Sandra said to her. "This one's the one I've been after right along."

"My hips," said the girl Maxine, "are irresistible." She giggled, and then sighed. Suddenly tears started to flow down Sandra's cheeks, her face worked oddly.

"Please—" Sandra gasped, "leave us, Maxie. My poor, dearest Maxie. . . ."

Maxine turned, and with a sensuous swaying of her hips, vanished among the shadows. Sandra looked at me again, composure putting her features back into the little-girl mask.

"Maxie is—dying," she said to me, taking a deep breath. "I—killed her, Ronnie. It was selfish, but I was desperate! When your father offered me that blood transfusion last year after the motor accident, I took it, but I was still weak. Needed more transfusions. Your father was still willing to be generous, but doctors warned him that he'd get leukemia from too much blood-letting. *So I took blood from Maxine!*

"No doctor in the world would have let her give me as much as she did—we had to do it at home, privately. You know, I was a nurse once. Oh, I was nearly crazy with fear, Ronnie—fear for myself. I got over it all right, but—Maxie was doomed.

"THAT made me desperate too. I lured men to our place, night after night, gave them drugged drinks. If they had the wrong type of blood, they woke up and went their ways, thinking merely that they'd been drunk. If they had the right type, the type we needed for Maxie, they woke up sick. They went to doctors, who told them they had leukemia, that they were dying. Then I stepped in, offered to keep them alive if they induced others to come to me. Others who would yield their blood. . . .

"It was a desperate game, but it worked. The dying bring me their healthy victims, and soon the victims are dying, too . . . if they have the right type of blood, which you have. You're your father's son, Ronnie. I haven't taken that much from you yet, you'll pull through. But I may . . ."

I struggled against my bonds, and fell back. I felt dizzy and sick, weak as water. An infernal bell was tolling in my brain.

"I had to give them morphine with the blood, Ronnie," she went on, "so they'd believe what I told them, that I'd discovered a chemical which would check leukemia when it was added to a blood transfusion. They *have* to believe me. If they informed the police, they'd go to jail too, and die there—because now they're as guilty as I am.

"But it gave me an idea, a valuable idea. I'd taken my own daughter's life—like a werewolf. I could become a werewolf—on Wall Street! You know yourself what I made these victims of mine do on the market—and I can be rich now, Ronnie, rich as an empress!"

I tried to tell her to go to hell—but then, she was there already, and so was I. "You're not going to—kill Terry, are you?" I whispered.

"Not if you're a good boy," she answered. The chic little-girl face was composed now, but into her voice had crept a

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strident harshness. "You're going to do me a favor, Ronnie. You're going to call your father, and you'll tell him he's to start buying where Harry Gaines left off."

"Why don't you tell him yourself?" I snarled.

"Because if I told your father that, he'd kill me before I had a chance to finish. I know him when he's in a temper! But he won't kill you. When he sees you helpless, with half the blood gone from your body, he'll come around.

"You phone him, and tell him to come down here. Now, get this straight—Harry was buying in *my* name. So were all the others, whom you see out there. I've got a corner on almost everything in the market. It doesn't mean much yet, because prices are at rock bottom. There's only one man big enough to send prices up now—big enough to buy what I've got to sell. And that's your father. When prices soar again, I'll have his millions—and he'll have you, if he does as he's told.

"Dear old Chet, he's worth more to me healthy and alive than sick or dead. That's why I wanted *you* here, Ronnie. You and your girl, too, in case you were ready to sacrifice your own life for your father. You won't sacrifice Terry's."

"No," I muttered. "Not Terry's."

"I knew you were dangerous to my operations," she continued. "I got you just in time. I knew it when Brown came last night to tell me you'd seen Gaines outside Marcia's bedroom window. Gaines was dangerous, too. He'd gone haywire. That's why he didn't get his full quota of blood last night. That's why he died this afternoon.

"And so you'll phone Chet, and he'll come down here. You'll be alone with him—but I'll be listening. With my men, and with Terry. One slip from you, and they'll cut her wide open. If you try to tip your father off, if you make him rush

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me, he'll be killed. If you send him for help, you and Terry won't be alive when he gets back. Those men haven't had their full quota of blood tonight, not yet—but if you refuse to call your father, they'll get it from your veins. You'll die of that. Much better they die, tomorrow afternoon, the way Harry did—much better all around. You see, we must keep scandal from touching your father's future wife."

"His future *what?*" I gasped.

"Wife. You didn't think I'd be stupid enough not to cover up, did you? No, Chet will have to lend me the protection of his name till this blows over. Just plain Sandra Howard would look too conspicuous going about with a brand new fortune. Mrs. Chet Wallace would be safe. You can tell him I'm willing to leave for Europe right after the ceremony."

I said, "I can't do it."

"No? When we get women here, they aren't always used as blood donors. There are other uses to which doomed men may put a woman if I permit. Sometimes the women don't enjoy it, and they save us the trouble of getting rid of them—there are lots of bodies in Young Carter's safe, Ronnie—there'd be room for Terry there."

I thought of that broken body on the sidewalk—and groaned. Fantastic rustling figures were swirling nearer the unconscious girl. God, it was the damndest choice a man ever had to make! Dad ruined, mouth sealed by an alternative no ordinary blackmailer could have conceived, and tied legally to a woman who called herself, with all justification, a werewolf—or Terry, thrown to those hounds of Sandra's for blood-letting, or worse. . . . It didn't much matter any more what happened to me.

Terry or Dad. Terry . . . or . . . Dad!

"Well?" Sandra said impatiently. "Look! They're closing in on Terry—if I

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don't stop them. . . .

I looked. "I'll do it," I gasped. "I'll do anything."

They unbound me, and left me alone in the office to telephone Dad. Still, I could barely move. And I knew Sandra was listening. When he arrived he was in a towering rage.

"What the hell's the idea of your being here at midnight!" he blazed. "And telling me to come alone. . . ."

"Dad," I began, and then his face went gray.

"Ronnie, you're dying!" he exclaimed.

"I will be," I whispered to him, "unless you—" God, how could I go on? Terry or Dad. I didn't know.

And then a shot pierced the silence, and Dad leapt into the inner office where Sandra was listening. I tried to shout after him, "They'll kill you, too . . ." but he went anyway. They've killed her, I thought in a mad panic, they've killed my Terry. . . .

There was another shot. And another, and another. Then, through a haze, I saw Dad reappear, with Terry in his arms, and *Maxine* was walking beside him. There wasn't a blemish on Terry's body. "You take the girl," I heard Dad say to Maxie. "Ronnie's pretty heavy, and he's too weak to walk."

Tears were streaking down Maxie's painted face. "Sorry, Ronnie," she said to me. "I couldn't stand it—any more—she was too evil to live. I thought I loved her enough to help her do anything she wanted, but when she tried to ruin *your* life, that was too much. You see, Ronnie, your happiness is really all that matters to me. I've loved you from the day I first saw you, after Mother's accident. This is the only reparation I can make." She raised the pistol in her hand. Before anyone could move, she pulled the trigger. Her young form drooped slowly until she lay at my feet. A long quiver shook her—and then she was still.

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I tried to say something, but a wave of dizziness came over me, and everything went black. . . .

A PAIR of grey eyes were looking into mine, and I was lying in my own bed. Sunlight, blessed simple sunlight, poured into the room.

"I've been with you all day," Terry said. "You've been saying the queerest things. . . ."

I tried to lift my arms to her, but I guess I just wasn't strong enough. "How are you?" I managed to murmur.

"Well, look at me," she answered ruefully. I looked. She was adorably smothered in my size A pyjamas. "Your father's had me doctored on the premises. I'm just about getting over the stomach pump. There was a dreadful amount of dope in me, I guess."

Fear shot through me, shaky fear that made me want to weep. "Terry—do you remember—can you tell me what happened after—"

The grey eyes veiled themselves. "I don't know," she said. "I was standing in the corridor, waiting for you, when a man with a white face came up to me. It might have been Harry. I felt something prick me . . . everything was like a dream after that, a dream I can't remember, till I woke up, here."

A dream she couldn't remember. Just how far had those blood purveyors used her drugged body to further their plans? I didn't know, and she didn't know, and there was no way of finding out. . . .

"Maxie," I murmured. "It was Maxie and Sandra. . . ."

Terry began to weep, very softly. "I used to be so fond of Maxie," she said. "And—I'm sorry. Your father told me—Maxie shot Sandra through the heart, you see, without warning. The others thought she'd killed the only person who could save their lives, and she stood

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there, and told them it was a hoax. They were ready to kill her—and she started shooting them, one by one. But I guess they'd have killed her anyway, if your father hadn't rushed them. It is Maxie and your father we owe our lives to. Poor Maxie—she tried to make it up to you in the only way she knew.

“That was two days ago. Two of the others escaped Maxie's bullets, but they're dead now anyway.” She wiped her tears away. “They called us this morning from the hospital. Marcia's a little better. She'll live.”

Marcia would live. Why, I didn't know. There couldn't be much joy left in her living . . . but was there in ours? Because they had taken blood from me, huge quantities of blood. They had taken it from Harry, too. What if—I blinked at the sunshine, trying to get the courage somehow even to think the thing. What if I were to turn into a feverish pale ghost like Harry and the others? What if I too went mad, tore at the girl I loved as Harry had torn at her sister?

“I can't marry you, Terry,” I whispered. “Not till I know . . .”

“About me?” she asked in a small voice. “About what happened—while I was asleep?”

“No,” I answered. “Not you. You'll always be the purest thing in the world to me. Till I know—about myself.”

Terry was still there, two days later, when a famous doctor came to test me for anemia. I felt calmer, more at ease, but there was a sadness in me that had aged me. I'll never be young again, and I haven't passed the quarter-century mark.

Doctor Holmes took a blood specimen from my finger, and snorted. “You're healthy as a truck-horse,” he said. “What makes you think you're anaemic?”

I didn't tell him the whole story, because I couldn't talk about it.

“Well,” he said thoughtfully. “You

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seem all right now, but you might come back twice a year for a check-up. . . .”

Then it could *still* happen! That’s what haunts me even now. Terry refused to cancel our marriage, but there are nights when I lie by her side, listening to the beat of my own heart as the blood courses through it. Good, rich blood—but will it always be that? I pray to God that He will take my life at once if that blood ever gets thin—before I grow thirsty and turn on the peaceful sleeping woman at my side . . . tearing to ribbons of gory flesh the thing I love most in the world.

THE END