

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 29

CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1937

Number 1

Cover Design	Margaret Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene from "Children of the Bat"</i>		
Children of the Bat	Seabury Quinn	2
<i>A brilliant exploit of Jules de Grandin in the weird jungles of Yucatan</i>		
The Dead Moan Low	Paul Ernst	25
<i>A faint, eery cry sounded out as the hypnotist's wife was consigned to the flames</i>		
The Woman in Room 607	Thorp McClusky	35
<i>A strange, weird tale about a woman who clung too closely to life</i>		
City in the Sea	Edgar Daniel Kramer	51
<i>Verse</i>		
The Thing on the Door-step	H. P. Lovecraft	52
<i>A powerful tale, which works up to a tremendous climax of stark horror</i>		
Fate Weaves a Web	Alfred I. Tooke	70
<i>Destiny wove a net from which there was no escape—an odd and curious story</i>		
The Headless Miller of Kobold's Keep	G. Garnet	79
<i>An unusual tale, about the degeneration of the Kobolder family through centuries of inbreeding</i>		
Omega	Howell Calhoun	92
<i>Verse</i>		
The Eater of Souls	Henry Kuttner	93
<i>A short tale about a strange entity on a distant world</i>		
The Disinterment	Duane W. Rimel	95
<i>Resurrected from a hideous death in the grave, this man found himself yoked to an even greater horror in life</i>		
The House on Fifth Avenue	Durbin Lee Horner	103
<i>Who were these grisly guests, who sat around the table like ghastly specters?</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Eighth Green Man	G. G. Pendarves	109
<i>A story from WEIRD TALES of eight years ago, reprinted by popular request</i>		
The Eyrie		122
<i>Our readers exchange opinions</i>		

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1937, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



The Woman in Room 607

By THORP McCLUSKY

A strange, weird story about a woman who clung too closely to life—a tale about the morbid horror that flowed out from under the door of that room in the Hotel Northrup

1. An Appeal for Help

IT WAS a little after eleven in the evening when Police Commissioner Charles B. Ethredge met the woman. . . .

Ethredge, who sometimes rebelled

from the too-frequently sedentary nature of his office, had been taking a long nocturnal stroll.

Strolling now, stopping at times to gaze into the brightly lighted shop windows or to study the theater lobby displays, unobtrusively receiving the defer-

entia, friendly salutes of the plainclothesmen he met, watching the clock-like regularity with which the prowl cars patrolled the streets, Ethredge found himself in midtown. He stepped into a doorway to watch the homeward-bound theater-goers pass.

And then he saw the woman coming toward him through the throng, lithely, gracefully, effortlessly, moving through those people like a curl of smoke about a man's fingers.

It was almost as though either they or she did not exist.

"She must be a dancer," Ethredge thought, idly watching.

In the next moment, to his surprize, she stepped into the doorway beside him. Her eyes questioningly searched his face. "Commissioner Ethredge?" she said softly.

"Yes."

Ethredge looked at her more closely, and gasped at what he saw. She was like the women a man sees in dreams. There was an alien, unreal beauty about her: magnificent coal-black eyes looking broodingly upon Ethredge through the half-gloom; a paper-thin, startlingly white skin; masses of raven hair; and the reddest, most wanton mouth Ethredge had ever seen.

She was a splendid, vital animal, Ethredge knew. Even to look upon her set his pulses hammering. And suddenly, incomprehensibly, the quick memory of Mary's blond perfection seemed insipid. Yet Ethredge loved Mary Roberts!

He strove to steel himself against the reeling shock of this woman's magnetism.

"Don't you know me?" she was asking. "I am Marilyn Des Lys. You have seen me dance. In April, at Mayor Hardy's Milk Fund Benefit—you complimented me."

"I recollect you now," Ethredge said,

with dazed politeness. "You danced very well."

She smiled, and again the memory of Mary seemed suddenly drab. And then she touched his arm.

"I need your help. You must come with me, must let me talk to you. I am in desperate need. Come; come with me now."

But Ethredge hesitated, even though his whole body seemed incredibly to have taken possession of his mind, seemed clamoring to follow her.

She looked at him, then, closely.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked suddenly.

Ethredge shook his head.

"No." The word sounded thick and dry.

She laughed briefly, and that laugh sent a delicious, tingling chill shuddering along Ethredge's spine.

"I know of Mary Roberts," she whispered. "I know many, many things. Do not be afraid. . . ."

Through the luring fog that her siren voice had dropped between himself and sanity, Ethredge followed her. . . .

2. "Another Doppel"

IT WAS not far, not over two blocks. Her arm linked through his, Marilyn Des Lys stopped Ethredge beneath the gaudy marquee of a third-rate hotel on the edge of the theatrical district. Ethredge knew this hotel—the Northrup. It was a place where drunken brawls were frequent; shady women and broken-down troupers formed, for the most part, its clientele.

For an instant Ethredge drew back, but it seemed as if the woman had cast an enchantment over him. He followed her into the hotel.

As they passed through the dingy lobby toward the single elevator at the rear

Ethredge hazily realized that the desk clerk was looking at him.

"Mister!" The clerk's voice was sharp. "Where you going?"

Softly the woman whispered to Ethredge, "Room 607."

"607," Ethredge heard himself mumble.

The clerk's body stiffened. He had only seemed to notice Ethredge, but now he stared intently toward the woman. Quite distinctly Ethredge saw two small rows of sweat spring out above his brows. And then a fanatic gleam, lurking in the depths of his dark Latin eyes, suddenly flamed.

"O. K.," he said, with a strange exultation. "Go ahead."

Through the delicious haze enveloping him, Ethredge yet knew that something odd was occurring. . . .

They entered the elevator. The boy, yawning, put down the detective magazine he had been reading and clanged the grilled doors. The elevator climbed its black shaft uncertainly, with rickety groans and swayings.

"607," the woman said again, and her limpid black eyes gazed beseechingly into Ethredge's. . . .

The elevator did not stop. With a faint, far-off feeling of resentment at the boy's stupidity, Ethredge watched the floors sinking before his eyes. And then the car stopped with a jerk, and the boy swung open the doors.

"This is the top floor, sir."

"607," Ethredge heard himself snap; then, angrily: "Can't you hear?"

The boy shrugged and closed the doors.

"Sorry, sir. I didn't hear you call out any floor."

The elevator descended. At the sixth floor Ethredge and Marilyn Des Lys, the woman leading, got out. Ethredge felt the boy's eyes burning into his back as the doors closed behind him. But he did

not hear the lad's muttered remark as the car rocked downward.

"Another damn dope!" the youth had whispered. "That makes a half-dozen of 'em in the last few days, gettin' off at the sixth."

3. *The Horror in the Mirror*

ROOM 607 in the Hotel Northrup was at the end of a meagerly lighted, plush-carpeted corridor. Marilyn Des Lys, stalking before Ethredge as sinuously as a feline, stood before the door with regal calm and gestured.

"It's unlocked."

Ethredge, his thoughts wavering between the certainty that this was a dream and the conviction that it was reality, opened the door. Within was darkness.

"The light," Marilyn Des Lys purred. "To the right of the door."

Ethredge's fingers, fumbling, found and pressed the switch. A soft, dim rosi-ness flooded the chamber.

Ethredge looked about.

This room was larger than the average hotel room, and had probably, during the Northrup's more pretentious days, served as the living-room of a suite. But now it was only a commodious bedroom, furnished, however, with a low divan and two or three chairs in addition to the customary bed and bureau. Obviously it was a room in which Marilyn Des Lys—entertained. A few cheap pictures, a moth-eaten rug, and a multitude of pillows scattered about completed the furnishings.

Two interior doors broke the monotony of wall space. One, closed, and fitted with a full-length mirror, led presumably to the bathroom. The other door was open.

And then Marilyn Des Lys saw that open door. Standing stock-still in the center of the room, she pointed to it.

"Shut that door!" she commanded harshly.

Ethredge, a dim fragment of his mind struggling still to force him back to sanity, closed the door. It was only the door to a closet filled with a bewildering array of feminine things. Yet it struck Ethredge as odd that, hanging in that closet, he had seen the twin to the rust-colored suit she wore, even to the fox collar and the square, distinctively designed buttons.

Did she, then, buy her clothes in duplicate?

"The maid——" she was saying. "She's such a fool. I hate to have my closet doors left open. It makes the room seem so messy."

She linked her arm through Ethredge's and drew him gently toward the divan. They sank down upon it, side by side. She leaned back, half reclining among the pillows, one arm thrown behind her head, her fingers absently toying with her lustrous hair. Her eyes, like those of some alluring odalisque, never left Ethredge's face.

"Smoke?" Ethredge asked unsteadily.

Smiling inscrutably, she slowly shook her head. "I haven't smoked, recently," she said, in a low, urgent whisper. "But perhaps you would like a drink? There are liquors in that cabinet." Her voluptuous arm pointed languorously.

Ethredge rose, and took from the cabinet a decanter and two small goblets.

"I think it is apricot brandy," the whisper came from the divan. "Take as much as you like for yourself, but I cannot drink with you. Perhaps within a few days I shall be able to drink again."

Ethredge turned.

"I will not drink without you," he heard himself say, as he returned to her.

Did a baffled look flicker briefly across her face?

With a shrug, then, she made room for Ethredge beside her on the divan. Re-

laxing beside her, he could feel the electric nearness of her long, perfect legs; the animal warmth of her splendid body, so close to him was like the caress of a hot tropic wind, maddening and deadly.

Her eyes looked upward into his face, velvety and yet bold, promising him anything a man might ask.

"Sit closer to me, Charles Ethredge," she breathed. "I have wanted you—oh, this long time! I have cut your picture from the papers, and, whenever I danced, knowing that you were there, I always danced my best. And when you spoke to me——"

"I want you, Charles Ethredge. I will give you love beside which the love of Mary Roberts will seem tasteless. I will give you love such as no man has ever known. I will give you love that will endure beyond death itself. Kiss me."

IN THAT instant a flash of self-disgust, of clean sanity, swept Ethredge like an icy wind. With hideous clarity he saw the cheap room in which he sat, the wanton creature reclining there beside him, and his heart sickened with revulsion. Could it be possible that his mind had even contemplated this insult to Mary? He struggled to rise.

But the woman's arms, like soft white serpents, had twined about his neck. Her breasts were pressed against his thudding heart; her parted lips had fastened hungrily upon his mouth. His arms tightened to push her away, but a languor was rushing through him, delicious mists of unreality were settling upon his senses in pounding, insistent waves. He was no longer conscious of the room, the divan, of the pillows, of himself as Charles Ethredge; he was conscious only of the body of this woman lying within his arms. His arms encircled her yielding form; his mouth returned her kiss.

Again he heard her voice, speaking dreamily, with a strange assurance:

"You have forgotten Mary Roberts now?" the voice was saying, tenderly.

Mary's name! With a hoarse, strangled cry of utter revulsion, Ethredge staggered to his feet. His head was swirling, and his eyes seemed oddly out of focus. In the mirror across the room he saw his own image, its face drawn with self-contempt, its arms outflung.

And then his throat muscles tightened in a scream, a scream that hurtled soundlessly from a mouth paralyzed with horror!

For in that mirror, although he could see his own image clearly, and, behind it, the long low mass of the couch with its profusion of pillows, there showed no reflection of the woman! Instead, there was the reflection of something shadowy and vague and cloudy-looking, like a thick fog, that writhed and billowed upon that couch, coiling and twisting angrily!

Soundlessly screaming, as a man screams in nightmare, Ethredge rushed from that room into the dingy corridor, down to the elevator. His fingers dug tremblingly at the buzzer. And then, when the elevator did not instantly respond, unable longer to endure the midnight silence within that corridor, he plunged through the fire exit door, ran terror-stricken down the stairs. . . .

4. *A Room for the Dead*

IT WAS early afternoon. Throughout the day Commissioner Charles B. Ethredge had sat at his desk like an automaton, his thoughts turned inward upon himself, his mind preoccupied with the dread that perhaps he was near madness, if not already mad.

The harsh jangle of the telephone roused him from the torpor into which he had fallen. With a sudden, inexpli-

cable tingling of apprehension, he lifted the receiver.

It was Detective-Lieutenant Peters, and the voice of Ethredge's subordinate, over the wire, crackled with excitement.

"There's a lad down here who says he's certain there's a dope ring operating from the sixth floor of the Northrup. He's the night elevator operator over there."

Ethredge heard his own voice snap, with a strange eagerness, "When the narcotics squad's finished with him, report to me at once. . . ."

An hour later Peters entered Ethredge's office.

"It looks like dope, all right," he announced quickly. "You remember those six or seven fellows we've picked up within the past few days, all around midtown, all stark crazy? And thin, like? That elevator lad—Leslie, his name is, Donald Leslie—says he's sure they got the stuff on the sixth floor of the Northrup and then wandered out, hopped to the gills."

"Funny dope!" Ethredge muttered, with a shudder. "I saw those fellows over at the Municipal Hospital, and they didn't look like dope cases to me. Two of them've been there almost a week, and they're both crazy as loons."

"Well," Peters said stubbornly, "Casidy's taken this Leslie over to see if he can make any identifications. We'll know more when he gets back. But, in the meantime, we've found out that the stuff came from room 607. Leslie's sure."

"607?" Ethredge whispered.

Peters nodded. "Funny about that, too. The room's unoccupied—has been for a week. But the rent's paid ahead and the room contains a woman's belongings—dresses, coats, hats, cosmetics. A Marilyn Des Lys had the room, lived there for several years. A cooch dancer and courtesan, she was. Very beautiful,

too, Leslie says. The night clerk was in love with her."

"Marilyn Des Lys?" Ethredge asked thinly. His hands were trembling. "Why don't you find her, bring her in for questioning?"

Peters looked at his chief, and his face was expressionless.

"Her rent must have been paid ahead by some lover of hers. We can't bring her in for questioning, Commissioner.

"Marilyn Des Lys died in that room, one week ago Sunday night. Her body was cremated at Woodacres eight days ago!"

5. *The Elevator Boy*

THAT evening Ethredge and Mary Roberts dined at the Park Casino. It had been their plan to go from dinner to the Milano Club, where Dino and Stella were dancing. But Mary, early noting the preoccupied expression on her fiancé's face, had tactfully asked, instead, to be taken home. Some other time. . . .

It was with almost a feeling of relief that Ethredge left her at home and turned the long black nose of his sedan toward midtown. It was with a feeling of growing eagerness that he parked near the Northrup and set out, walking.

As Ethredge approached the Northrup he realized that he was involuntarily scanning the faces of the passers-by, as though he sought someone.

Marilyn Des Lys? Marilyn Des Lys was dead! . . .

At the entrance to the hotel he hesitated a moment, then walked inside. He strode through the lobby quickly, noting as he passed the desk that the intent gaze of the night clerk followed him—incredulously, it seemed. And then he was entering the elevator. He braced himself to face the boy's recognition, waited for Leslie to speak.

The doors clanged; the elevator creaked upward.

"You got off at the sixth last night," the boy said. There was contempt in his voice.

"He has recognized me!" Ethredge thought. "I was here, then; *that* was no dream!"

Aloud he said, "Yes. The same floor again tonight, please."

Scornfully the lad said, "You were in a swell daze last night. Didn't seem to know *where* you were going."

Ethredge spoke the words before he was aware. "But—the lady with me—I expected her——"

The boy half turned to look at him. "Say, are you entirely cuckoo? There wasn't no lady with you. You were alone!"

6. *A Pillar of Mist*

THE sixth floor corridor was deserted. But Ethredge, looking up and down its garish, dimly lighted length, knew that the man Cassidy had assigned to the Northrup would probably be on the fire stairs, a strategic position from which he could watch room 607 without danger of detection. Yet it was with a curious feeling of relief that he pushed open the door and actually found the man.

"Grogan!" Ethredge exclaimed.

Grogan grinned. "Good to see me, Commissioner?"

Ethredge laughed uneasily. "This place gets one."

"Yeah," Grogan commented. "It's a creepy dump, all right. There's been nothing funny, though, so far. Only a few stumblebums."

"Nobody in or out of 607?"

Grogan spat disgustedly, shook his head. "I dassent open this door very wide, Commish; you know that. But from the peeks I've got, and I've spotted every-

body, nobody's come down that corridor that looked out of the way at all."

"Well——" Ethredge said. He reached in his pocket for a cigar.

And in that instant Grogan flattened against the door, opened it the merest crack.

"Shh!"

A door had opened at the end of the corridor. And from that door had stumbled a man, weaving as though drunk or blind, and behind the man poured a pillar of thick whitish mist that moved by his side and seemed to urge him forward!

"Fire!" Grogan burst into the corridor.

But Ethredge, with an abrupt chill running the length of his spine like a needle-spray, knew that it was not smoke that eddied opaquely beside that man.

With the rapidity of fog dissipating beneath a morning sun, the pillar of mist thinned into invisibility. It was gone.

"What the——" Grogan muttered dazedly.

But the man had not vanished as had the fog. He had slumped to the floor and lay there inertly, relaxed to almost corpse-like grotesqueness. The door to room 607 stood open. No light shone from within the room.

Together Ethredge and Grogan stooped over the man.

"Holy Moses!" Grogan whispered weakly.

The man was emaciated to the point of hideousness. The skin on his cheeks sagged in two long folds, as though the flesh had wasted away from within; his clothing hung loosely on his body; his collar seemed sizes too large for his dessicated throat. He was breathing in great rattling gasps, and Ethredge quickly forced open his jaws and administered a stimulant while Grogan ran to notify the elevator boy. Just as Grogan returned, the man opened his eyes.

They were gray eyes, handsome eyes.

But now they were pools of insane horror.

"What's the matter?" Grogan asked.

"Speak; we're friends."

But the man was beyond speech.

Grogan looked appealingly at his chief. Ethredge slowly shook his head.

And then the elevator clanged, and the corridor was suddenly full of the sound of men's voices and the hurried treading of feet. Two plainclothesmen, a patrolman in uniform, a little man carrying a black bag who was evidently a resident physician, and Detective-Lieutenant Peters came down the corridor.

"Commissioner!" Peters exclaimed.

Somberly Ethredge nodded. "I had to come here." His voice was flat and hard.

The little doctor dropped to his knees beside the crazed, emaciated thing lying on the plush carpet. The detectives and police officers grouped about in a tense, narrow circle. Ethredge stood close against the wall, his flesh tingling, crawling.

Almost as by a wordless command he felt himself drawn toward the open door of room 607. The curious desire was in him to enter that room, to learn for himself if it really looked as that nightmarish memory pictured it.

Had he been in that room before?

Stealthily Ethredge moved along the wall. The ebony mouth of room 607 gaped before him. He entered, touched the cool, smooth light-switch.

And then his nerves leaped. In the darkness something had encircled his wrist, something pliant and weak, like a coil of cobwebby rubber, something neither warm nor cold.

"They must not search this room!" It was Marilyn Des Lys' voice.

A SCREAM froze in Ethredge's throat. With an instinctive, involuntary reaction he tore his hand from the thing that clasped it, and turned on the light.

There, billowing in that rose-tinted room, stood a column of thick, colorless mist! It was a little less than Ethredge's own height, and, changing and eddying and coiling uncertainly as though with great difficulty it maintained any shape at all, it was yet molded in the vague shape of a woman. Its hands and arms and ankles were faintly transparent, while the thicker portions, the hips and breasts, were quite opaque. It was a column of fog, yet it lived and had mass and weight.

A voice, Marilyn Des Lys' voice, seemed to speak from that billowing, smoke-like thing.

"You know me for what I am," the voice said simply. "I cannot delude you longer with illusions; your mind rejects them. But," and the voice became insistent, demanding, "your men are outside. They must not take this room from me, for a little while. Send them away and remain with me."

There was a throbbing eagerness in that voice that fascinated Ethredge, once again, despite his horror. And suddenly that eagerness, that longing, turned to menace as the thing added:

"You would not have Mary Roberts mad? You would not have her like that man who lies outside in the corridor? Then do as I say!"

The eddying column of incredible life had heard Peters' voice, urging his men toward that room!

And then, swiftly, in the instant that Peters appeared in the doorway, the thing shrank, dwindled, flowed through the narrow crack beneath the bathroom door like a white slime!

Ethredge, his face ashen, stared at Peters.

"For God's sake, Commissioner," Peters ejaculated, "what's the matter? You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

Ethredge forced a smile to his lips. "I'm all right, Peters," he said shakily,

"The sight of that man out there unnerved me. I want to look this room over—by myself."

The Detective-Lieutenant looked narrowly at his superior.

"You've a theory, Commissioner?" he asked meaningly.

Slowly Ethredge nodded. "Yes, a theory," he said heavily. "I want to be left here by myself for a while."

Peters' face was expressionless. "O. K., Commissioner. We'll go along and pump that desk clerk. Come on, boys . . ."

Though Ethredge did not know, as he went down the corridor Peters signed to Grogan to remain behind. Peters had seen the fear on Ethredge's face, and he had begun to wonder, too, about Marilyn Des Lys. . . .

7. *Marilyn Des Lys*

ETHREDGE stood stock-still in the center of that room, listening to the receding footsteps of Peters' men, watching with a horrible fascination the thin crack beneath the bathroom door. And then he heard the sounds, the faint sounds, like the lapping of ooze across cold tiles. . . .

The thing was flowing into the room, rearing upward once again into the vague shape of a woman! And then it spoke.

"I am becoming more real, Charles Ethredge? See, I am no longer intangible. Watch."

Lazily it approached the bureau, and one of its arm-like, pallid tentacles moved gracefully, lifted, seemingly with effort, a small trinket box, let the object fall with a slight thud. The thing turned toward Ethredge, seemed to smile.

"Sit beside me." With an oddly seductive, gliding motion, it reclined on the couch. And Ethredge, drawn by the fascination he loathed yet could not resist, followed.

It moved close against him, nestled

against his body. And as it cuddled against him with protoplasmic fluidity that strange desire awakened in him once more; for, in repose, it had assumed, more and more, the likeness of a woman—a nude woman.

There was a hammering within Ethredge's skull like the beating of giant sledges. This wraith which had assumed, to a degree, substantiality, was the only thing in all the universe that remained real.

"I love you, Charles Ethredge," it was whispering. "I have loved you always. Kiss me."

"*What are you?*" Ethredge asked dreamily.

Passionately the thing answered, "I am a *will*. Once I was Marilyn Des Lys. And then, my body died. But I fought against the mists.

"On my death bed I was surrounded by friends who believed as I believed, who fought with me. They gave me of their life essence until the thread that bound me to my dead body had snapped. They had arranged that I should have this room during the—change. Charles Ethredge, within a few days I shall again be a woman, beautiful, wholly alive. Then I shall ask your love. We will go down through the ages together, always eluding the mists; for you, too, shall know my secret."

But again the memory of Mary Roberts, like the whisper of a distant, muted song, came to Ethredge.

"I cannot love you," he whispered. "I love another."

For a moment the woman-thing was silent, and Ethredge could feel its fury beating against him in cold, dread waves. And then, with awful finality, it spoke.

"Would you have Mary Roberts a mindless skeleton? If you would not, then kiss me now."

Ethredge reeled to his feet, stood there swaying, his mind a kaleidoscope of hor-

ror. His glazed eyes saw the decanter, and he snatched it up, drank gulpingly. Then, with a hoarse, choking sob, he sank on the couch beside the thing that said it had once been Marilyn Des Lys.

Slowly its arms encircled him, eagerly its mouth sought and found his own. . . .

The minutes passed. At last the thing's face lifted from Ethredge's mouth, while its eyes lingered caressingly on his pallid, strangely sunken cheeks.

"I must not drink from you more, beloved," it murmured. "I must have you sane, when at last I become a woman."

Regretfully it rose from Ethredge's still body, glided to the center of the room, stood regarding itself in the full-length mirror. A slow sigh of satisfaction escaped its lips, for in the mirror it now appeared solid, real. Its coloring had deepened, its hair was raven-black, its lips were full and red. It smiled, then, and glanced speculatively toward the closet door. Its slender, white hand reached out and touched the knob; the long, lithe muscles along its arm tightened. And slowly, with infinite effort, it opened the door.

It stood looking at the array of clothing hanging within, neatly, carefully arranged, ready to be put on. . . .

8. *The Night Clerk*

DETECTIVE-LIEUTENANT PETERS was idly questioning Nick Gallicchio, the Northrup's night clerk, when both men, almost simultaneously, saw the tall, raven-haired woman step from the elevator and walk toward them, slowly and, as it were, feebly.

She came directly to the desk, glanced casually at Peters, spoke to Gallicchio.

"The key, Nicky," she said, in a voice as thrilling as it was soft and low.

The night clerk opened a drawer in his desk and took out an envelope, which he

handed to her. His hands were trembling.

"I will meet you at dawn, Marilyn," he said eagerly.

The woman touched her fingers warningly to her lips. Then she took the envelope, placed it in her hand-bag. With an alluring smile at the man, she turned, walked slowly and hesitatingly from the Northrup's lobby. . . .

Peters was thinking, "Marilyn . . . Marilyn?"

And then he cursed, leaped toward the elevator!

"Six!" he rasped.

The elevator boy sat on his little stool staring at his row of signal tabs, but he gave no sign that he had heard.

"Hey, you!" Peters exclaimed. "Wake up! Six!"

The boy's whole body was trembling spasmodically, and there was mucus at the corners of his mouth. His face was pasty white.

Peters shook the boy, and the lad's head turned shakingly toward him. The pupils of his eyes were enormous with terror.

"Marilyn Des Lys' ghost!" the boy mumbled. "Marilyn Des Lys' ghost, riding on this elevator!"

Peters snarled an oath, grasped the controls, sent the elevator rocking upward to the sixth floor. . . .

On the fire exit stairs he found Grogan. And Grogan was as that man he had seen earlier in the evening, in the corridor.

Mumbling insane words, Peters ran to the door of Room 607. That door was unlocked.

Within, still, deathly pale, huddled on a maroon couch, lay Police Commissioner Ethredge. With a groan, Peters dropped to his knees beside his chief and began frantically chafing his nerveless hands and wrists. . . .

9. *A Rejected Lover*

THE pale gray light of dawn was streaming through the fly-specked lobby windows of the Northrup when, at last, Nick Gallicchio turned the desk over to the day clerk. Hurriedly Gallicchio left the hotel, took a taxicab to the sepulchral brownstone rooming-house where, a week before, he had engaged a light-housekeeping room.

The landlady, a ponderous, middle-aged woman in a pink satin wrapper, who already, a towel wrapped around her head, was busily sweeping the hall, greeted him with blowsy leer.

"Your *wife* come in this morning, Mr. Gallicchio," she said, with knowing suggestiveness. "I showed her your room, like you said. Very pretty woman, Mr. Gallicchio, I must say. Don't talk too noisy, Mr. Gallicchio, please. There's others in this house still a-sleeping yet."

But Nick Gallicchio had already vanished up the gloom-shrouded stairs. . . .

She was waiting for him, sitting relaxed in the room's single armchair. She wore the brown suit Ethredge had seen hanging in her closet at the Northrup. Her bag lay on the bureau.

"Marilyn!" He came eagerly across the room toward her.

She did not rise from the chair, but sat there looking up into his face with an enigmatic smile on her lips. He stooped to clasp her in his arms.

"Marilyn! Real flesh and blood again!"

Yes, she was real. The chair yielded to the impress of her weight, her hands and arms and throat and breasts were firm and substantial, her coloring was rich and distinct. The shadowy nebulosity had gone.

He stooped over her. But, with a little, impatient shrug, she averted her face, so that his kiss touched her cheek.

"Not now, Nicky," she murmured.

"I'm—not in the mood. Later—perhaps."

Gallicchio let his reluctant hands fall to his sides, for he looked upon her with a peculiar awe. She was Marilyn Des Lys, indeed, and yet that body of hers he sought to hold in his arms was not the body he had so often loved—that body had been burned into gray dust!

Marilyn Des Lys smiled.

"That's better, Nicky," she said indifferently. "I'd prefer that you not kiss me now. I don't feel—myself."

"Was it—bad?" Nicky asked gently. She shook her head.

"No. There was no pain at all. I was conscious; I could see you all, grouped about my body, sending out your thoughts to me, encouraging me. As the hours passed I could feel the thread that kept me close to my dead body weakening, and I could see your faces dimming. I was afraid, then. And when the thread snapped, Nicky, the grayness clutched at me. But you were all calling me back. I took the life essence from you all, Nicky, and I could see your faces grow drawn and haggard as I gained strength. And then the mists faded, Nicky, and I knew that I had won. I was like a mist, Nicky; you could neither see nor hear me, but I was real. . . .

"Since that night I have been adding to my material being. I took the life essence from drunkards, from the insane, from drugged persons, because they did not resist me. I became a vague mistiness, and I found that I could move bits of paper and other light objects, and that I could impress my thoughts upon others. I communicated with you, Nicky.

"I learned that I could hypnotize men into the belief that I was really a woman. You have always known my will, Nicky, and men have always been attracted to me. From that point on it was easier.

"Every night you unlocked the door

to my room; every day you locked it again. . . .

"Last night I was already a thick mist, heavy, almost, as water. I could lift the comb and brush on my dressing-table. And last night I took the life essence from three men, there in the Northrup.

"Yet I was not wholly a woman. And so, just before dawn today, I lured another man by a promise into an alley down the street, and today he is like those others."

She smiled, then, with a slow, seductive satisfaction.

"I weighed myself this morning, Nicky. Do you know what I weigh? One hundred eighteen pounds, Nicky. . . ."

Avid desire was in Gallicchio's black eyes.

"The others will be glad—that you are real," he said hoarsely.

"Yes," she said, as if absent-mindedly. "They will be glad."

Gallicchio dropped to his knees before her. His thick, stubby fingers reached out and clasped her wrists.

"Marilyn!" His arms went about her firm, lithe waist.

She struggled back from him, her face distorted.

"You—pig!" she spat, with venomous intensity. "Take your hands off me!"

She was pushing him away with all the strength in her finely molded arms. Gallicchio loosed his hold upon her waist.

"Marilyn! Marilyn!" There was heart-break in the words. "Don't you love me any more, Marilyn? You've loved me so long! You're everything to me, Marilyn. Even when I didn't believe, I joined the cult for you, Marilyn!"

She was on her feet, disheveled, her face a gargoyle mask of anger.

"Love you?" she sneered, while her beautiful, carmine lips curled. "I've

never loved you, you—wop! When I let you come to my room, when I smiled at you and was nice to you—did you think it was because I loved you? Fool, you were just the rent!"

Nick Gallicchio stood there, looking, looking at her. His face was like a mask, still as the face of one dead.

Quietly, without a word, he turned and went from that room.

Marilyn Des Lys stood looking at the door he had closed so softly behind him. Then she shrugged and sat down again in the chair. The shadow of a smile was on her lips as she murmured, "Oh, Charles! Charles Ethredge!"

10. Nick Tells All

PETERS sat at his own desk, staring at a bit of stained litmus paper. His flask, filled with Marilyn Des Lys' brandy, stood close at hand.

"Drugged, all right," Peters muttered. "And very pleasantly, too. Just enough to put a slightly toped person in a swell fog. What the devil!"

The door had opened, slowly. Peters leaped to his feet.

"Commissioner! I thought they had you safe in bed!"

Commissioner Ethredge sank into the nearest chair before he spoke.

"They've been pumping me full of blood, beef broth and raw eggs," he said, smiling faintly. "I regained consciousness a little after dawn. Doc Fagan wanted me to stay, but—here I am. I only lost twenty pounds."

"Damnation!" Peters exploded. "Of all the damn fool—"

The harsh jangle of the telephone interrupted him. With an irritated growl, Peters picked up the instrument.

"Peters speaking. What's that? The night clerk from the Northrup? Wants to talk? Looks like a grudge squeal,

you say? All right, Cassidy, bring him up!"

He cradled the phone. But Ethredge was on his feet, leaning over the desk.

"If Gallicchio talks, he talks in here—alone!" he said hoarsely. "Only the two of us must be here with him, Peters!"

Peters looked at his chief. A strange expression had settled over his face. Slowly he nodded.

"All right, Commissioner," he said quietly. "I had begun to wonder about Marilyn Des Lys myself. . . ."

Gallicchio, when Cassidy brought him in, was shaking, and his eyes burned with black, vindictive fire.

"Sit down, Nick," Peters said pleasantly.

The man glanced scornfully at the chairs. He was tense as a steel spring.

"I will not sit!" he shouted. "Marilyn Des Lys!"

Hot words poured from him with pent-up, torrential fury.

"This Marilyn Des Lys—you must kill her! She is not a woman—she is a thing that came back from the dead! Already she has taken the minds and the strength of many men, and she knows the secret! There are others with her—they are a cult. I thought them mad, but now I know! But she is the strong one—she is the one with the *will*—she is the only one who has come back. You must kill her, or there will be a horror on this Earth!"

"Not so fast, Nick," Peters interrupted quietly. "You'll have to cut the gibberish. Whom do you want us to kill, Nick, and why don't you kill her yourself? It's difficult for the police to go around killing people haphazardly, you know."

He was talking to calm the man, and yet—there was an intentness in him. . . .

The Italian stopped his nervous pacing and stared madly at the detective.

"I kill her?" he babbled incredulously. "I—who loved her? I could not kill her

with my own hands, policeman. Today, even today, the thought was in my mind, and I could not so much as lift a finger against her. But you——"

Ethredge, for the first time, spoke.

"I understand more about this than you know, Gallicchio," he said slowly. "Tell us—all that you know about Marilyn Des Lys. We will not laugh at you, Gallicchio, I promise you. And then—we will decide—what to do."

11. *The Cult of the Dead Who Live*

"**W**E MUST kill her, Commissioner!" Ethredge and Peters sat, alone, in Peters' small office. Gallicchio, heart-sick, babbling incoherently to himself, had gone, stumbling blindly, from the room. Pitying him, Peters had let him go. . . .

Slowly, then, Ethredge nodded.

"Yes, Peters," he agreed heavily. "She is too frightful a thing to let live. But if there were any other way——"

Peters turned his hands over, palms upward, and looked at them thoughtfully. Slowly his fingers flexed until his hands were upturned fists, blue-knuckled, unrelenting.

"There is no other way, Commissioner." Peters' mouth was grim. "I have watched this case from the start, and I knew, days ago, that those men who staggered from the Northrup Hotel to collapse in the streets, emaciated of body and ravaged of mind, were no dope addicts. Even then I knew that there were only two solutions—either those men had been exposed to some infection utterly unknown to medical science, or alien, occult forces were at work.

"Any germ theory I might form proved untenable. Those men ran no temperatures; their corpuscular count was normal; it was as though from every cell in their bodies had been drawn some

rare life-principle which cannot be isolated or studied under the microscope, yet whose absence left them drained and depleted as empty bags.

"I knew, of course, that Marilyn Des Lys had died in that room, so recently. And I knew, too, that she had been at the head of a small, exceedingly earnest spiritualist cult, a strange, fanatic cult which claimed to be able to do more than lend the ectoplasm of its sitters to those spirits determined enough to struggle back from the shadows to the vicinity of sympathetic mediums; this cult believed that the dead could, with the proper assistance from the living, come back and resume life!

"Ectoplasm—the word fascinated me. I knew that in ectoplasm lay the key to the mystery. Ectoplasm—that mysterious substance which mediums claim exudes, during séances, from their bodies and from the bodies of their sitters; ectoplasm—that strange vital stuff with which it is said spirits ring bells, sway draperies, touch faces, write notes, *appear in their own likeness!*"

Ethredge was staring, haggardly, at his subordinate.

"Perhaps, if we destroy Marilyn Des Lys, we will be making a supreme mistake!"

Somberly, Peters shook his head.

"Marilyn Des Lys is not a Messiah, Commissioner. She is but a will which abhorred death, a will so strong that, with sympathetic assistance, it has conquered death! And yet, God did not intend that the dead return! Had that been His will, the dead would have returned long ago.

"It is not God's will that the dead take life from the living! It is not God's will that a dozen strong men sink into the shadows of madness that one wanton may return.

"What would happen if Marilyn Des

Lys were left to live? This would happen: her cult would grow by leaps and bounds. When next a member lay close to death, a hundred hell-inspired devotees would group about his bed, to snatch his spirit back from eternity. They would feed him, like a spawning vampire, with the life essence of their fellow-men!"

And then Ethredge lifted his hand and let it fall heavily at his side.

"I see, now, that we must destroy her," he admitted. "But, Peters, do you know that we may face a murder charge?"

Peters stared inflexibly at his chief.

"I had thought of that," he admitted quietly. "If it must be, it must be. But—it is incredible that a thing of ectoplasm, a thing born of thought and the life essence of many men, can in death retain human shape. It is my belief that the thing will—change."

Ethredge stood up.

"Whatever happens, it is destiny," he said slowly. "Are you ready, Peters? What weapons shall we take?"

Peters picked up a slender, steel-bladed, bronze-hilted paper-knife that lay on his desk. It had been a gift; it had never been used, but it was sharp.

"I think that this will be sufficient," he murmured.

12. *A Dread Combat*

KNOCK, knock, knock. Peters' fists beat a questioning tattoo on the door Gallicchio had named, then paused. Half-way down the stairs, panting with righteous indignation, the fat landlady hovered.

There was a long silence from within the room. Then the soft sound of footsteps.

"Who is it? Nicky?"

Ethredge shivered. That voice—that alluringly rich contralto!

Quietly the door opened, a few inches. Peters' square-toed boot was in the crack with the rapidity of a striking serpent. His shoulder lunged against the door. The door burst open, the two men plunged into the room.

"Charles Ethredge!"

The woman's exclamation was an incredulous gasp. Yet, even in that instant of surprize, of fear-ridden shock, her arms half lifted toward him, her full-curved lips parted, trembling with passion. For the woman was Marilyn Des Lys!

Peters had stopped short. Marilyn Des Lys' beauty dominated the room like the beauty of some exotic flower, radiated a strange, unhuman splendor, enfolded and bathed the men in sensuous delight.

"God, Commissioner!" Peters babbled. "She's lovely!"

Slowly, like a puppet drawn by invisible strings, Ethredge was moving toward her, his eyes mad with horror, glazed with hypnotized desire.

"Marilyn! Marilyn!" The unuttered name hung in the air, pleaded and rang in the silence.

She stepped back, warily. Her lambent eyes were fixed on Ethredge's face, as though she knew that by controlling the Commissioner she also controlled Peters; yet she was also sending out waves of thought—seductive, sensual thought—in a desperate attempt to bend the detective to her will. She stepped back as the men advanced—Ethredge dazed beneath her spell, Peters striving to gain the cold courage to destroy this lovely thing.

Tantalizing thoughts danced in Peters' brain. He pictured her lying in his arms, her lips reaching upward toward his kiss, whispering words of love and passion. . . .

Suddenly, with a hoarse, inhuman cry, Ethredge seized her in his arms!

And in that instant Peters' hand slid

swiftly within his coat. That animalesque lunge of Ethredge's, so untrue to the man's real character, had shattered Marilyn Des Lys' spell like a hammer crashing against a soap-bubble. The little paper-knife flashed thinly.

A scream, vibrant with terror, burst from Marilyn Des Lys' throat. She shrank backward, half turning, struggling to free herself from Ethredge's encircling arms. And then Peters struck.

The narrow blade sheared through her woolen dress, sank hilt-deep in her shrinking breast. A ring of crimson blood jutted through the thick cloth.

She shuddered, and her fingers clutched the weapon's delicate hilt. Slowly, Ethredge supporting her, she sank to the floor. A brief, spasmodic trembling, and she lay still. The blood no longer spread across her breasts; its flow had ceased.

"She is dead!" Ethredge's words were stark and low. "You have killed her, Peters!"

But Peters did not hear. He was watching that still form on the floor at his feet.

The thing had not changed; it was to all appearances the body of a murdered woman!

PETERS wiped his hands tremblingly across his forehead.

"Dear Lord!" he whispered. "We've got a—corpse on our hands!"

There was a brisk knocking at the door!

"Who's screaming in there?" It was the landlady's voice.

"Go about your business, landlady!" Peters growled. "This doesn't concern you—keep away from that door!"

Cold beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, he turned back to Ethredge and the body of Marilyn Des Lys. . . .

A startled, horrified gasp burst from his taut lips. For Ethredge was kneeling over that beautiful, still body, his

W. T.—4

eyes curiously glazed, curiously fixed. It was as though he listened to the soundless voice of the dead!

And somehow Peters *knew*, knew that the malignant spirit of Marilyn Des Lys, still hovering close in that room, bound by some fast-weakening ectoplasmic thread to that dead body, was reaching out hungrily to Ethredge, dipping deep into his life-stuff, absorbing from his willing body the ectoplasm that would form the nucleus for a new body!

For Ethredge's face was turning gray, and his cheeks were sinking, falling in before Peters' eyes! Slowly he sank closer to the corpse until he sprawled supinely across it.

Cursing, Peters leaped to his feet, a wild, weird hope flaming through his brain.

"Landlady!" His voice was a hoarse, choked croaking. "Stop eavesdropping and get to the telephone; call Lincoln 6-1747! Get Mary Roberts—Mary Roberts—get her here at once, and to hell with traffic laws! Understand? Mary Roberts—Lincoln 6-1747."

He dropped to his knees, clenched his fists into Ethredge's shoulders, dragged his chief from that thing on the floor.

The mad, listening glare on Ethredge's face was fading.

"Dear God!" Peters thought. "He's dying!"

Leaden minutes passed. Ethredge's face was steadily thinning, becoming more hollow, more gaunt. His clothes lay about him loosely, he was breathing in quick, rattling gasps.

And then there was the quick rush of frantic footsteps up the stairs, along the hall. Peters leaped to the door, opened it just wide enough to admit Mary, slammed it quickly in the landlady's face.

"Charles! Oh, Charles boy!"

Mary reeled against Peters, stark horror in her eyes. That thing on the floor,

with the knife in its breast! But then, with a little whimpering cry, she ran to Ethredge, knelt beside him, pillowed his head in her arms. Her lips moved tremblingly.

"Oh Charles! Charles dearest!"

Peters stooped above them both.

"Call him, Mary!" he whispered. "Call him back—from close to death! The spirit of that—thing on the floor is sucking the life from him!"

Mary did not, could not, understand. But her lips were touching Ethredge's forehead, his eyes, his mouth.

"Charles! Charles!" she pleaded brokenly. "It's—it's your Mary! Speak to me, beloved; speak to me!"

Peters watched. And, although the expression on Ethredge's face did not change, in some way beyond human explanation Peters knew that he had heard, as if from far, far away, Mary's voice.

"Charles, Charles! It's Mary, your Mary! Come back to me, beloved!"

Ethredge's glazed eyes were upon Mary's face. And, with infinite slowness, a trace of sanity began to waver through the madness in them. His lips quivered.

"Charles! Charles!"

Fleeting as the passing of a breath across a window-pane, his lips formed the name, "Mary!"

"By Heaven!" Peters gritted exultantly, "she's beating the thing! She's making him resist—it can't feed upon him!"

The minutes passed. And then, suddenly, that strange sixth sense that had awakened in Peters that day told him that the invisible, lecherous spirit was withdrawing, baffled. The thread that bound it to that dead body on the floor was dissolving.

Had it absorbed sufficient ectoplasm from Ethredge to begin a new life, or had the mists claimed it?

Then, like the snapping off of an ultra-

violet light, the malign presence was gone, leaving behind it a curious tingling of frustration and despair.

And, oddly, Peters knew that this time the thing had not cheated Fate, that this time it had been swallowed in the silences and the mists of eternity. . . .

As though a sudden weight had been lifted from his shoulders, Peters exhaled a long pent-up breath, got shakingly to his feet. And then a scream tightened in his throat!

He saw the pool, the pool of colorless, gelatinous stuff, inches deep, faintly shimmering, extending across the floor in a great still blob from which exuded an odor as elusive as that of unpicked mushroom-rooms—and as delicately sweetish. . . .

That pool of still, gelatinous stuff, in the midst of which lay a woman's garments!

13. Nick Joins the Dead

HOURS later they stepped into the clean sunlight—Peters and Mary supporting Ethredge, pale and weak, between them. Ethredge's sedan still stood at the curb; Peters helped Mary and her fiancé into the rear seat, slid behind the wheel. With a strange chill prickling his body he placed the newspaper-wrapped bundle containing a woman's clothing and hand-bag on the seat beside him. He wondered, somberly, if he would ever forget those moments he had spent cleaning up that still, gelatinous mess. . . .

Ethredge's head lay against Mary's shoulder; her whole soul hovered over him, mothering him, protecting him.

Peters, adjusting himself comfortably behind the wheel of Ethredge's car, felt something smooth and bulky pressing against his left hip. It was the flask of Marilyn Des Lys' drugged brandy. And Peters, with the feel of that dead ooze

still cloying his finger-tips, knew that tonight he would drink and drink and drink until that flask was empty.

Ethredge's black sedan moved slowly into the city's crosstown traffic. . . .

Not until tomorrow would they three

know that at that very moment a man lay alone on Marilyn Des Lys' maroon couch in the Hotel Northrup, his muscles rigid, his face ghastly, his lips blue from strychnin—Nick Gallicchio, the poor broken-hearted devil who had loved the dead. . . .