

Weird Tales

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What Is It?

By CHARLES M. MORRIS

*Retribution, swift and terrible, struck the man who had
committed the sin of Cain*

I AM almost mad; madness has touched my brain, and when you hear my story your flesh will creep in horror. For there is something creeping upon me, which, like the stealthy stalk of a giant cat, comes slowly out of the darkness upon me, then will pounce, with an awful swiftness, to finish me. My only hope is that the bony fingers of insanity will clutch out and tear away the remaining strands of my mind. Then I shall become a howling, screaming thing—to be

taken, none too gently, away from here. But I am afraid it will be too late. There is something else . . . God knows I feel fear; it is the torture of fear that has made my mind grow strange.

I am in this big, silent room, with its dark, crimson drapes and its musty walls. There is but little light filtering through the dim windows. Along the wall stands a low, heavy table. Stretched out upon it is a figure covered by a white sheet. It is the body of my friend, Victor Bedard. He is dead, dead—with a knife in his heart. I have slain him, with my own hands. See, the stains of his blood are still on them. Horror of horrors! There is even blood spilled down my waistcoat.

We both loved Marie, my wife. She died yesterday, with his name on her lips. And so I killed him, that his black soul might join her in the horrid hell their sin has prepared for them.

Why don't they come, the officers, and take away that hideous corpse? I again cross the room, and lift the sheet from Victor's face. Ah! The eyes are still open, staring. . . . The lips, too, are parted, as they parted in his death agony. Why will they not come for me, and this staring thing on the table? I have sent word to them I have killed my friend, Victor Bedard. Perhaps they won't come for an hour—for a day. Perhaps—and this is what I fear—perhaps they won't need to come!

It is a nameless thing that I fear. It is not death, nor the human punishment that will be inflicted upon me for this deed. Nor do I fear madness. Insanity, if it comes, will be a blessing. It is something else which I can not name of which

I am afraid. And it is right here in this room with me, now.

What is it? It is like nothing in heaven or earth. It is part of that foul darkness that borders on nothing. It is a creature from out of the hell of hells that I fear. The room appears empty, except for this body and myself. I can not feel it; I can not see it; but I know it is here.

If only madness would seize me, or some one would come to take me away! Away from the terror of this room! I can not replace the sheet over Victor's twisted face. I need the company of even this cold body. I tear the sheet entirely away. He lies there with his legs spread out and his hands stiffly clutching nothing. The knife is buried to the hilt in his breast.

But there is that thing again! I can almost feel it brush me. I can hear, faintly, the sound of horrible laughter. I seize the hilt of the imbedded knife, and tug at it. It comes away, dripping dark blood. "Present yourself, Fiend of Darkness, but you shall not have me!"

There! What was that? It is the drip, drip, drip of blood coming along the floor! Coming toward me from the door! Each drip leaves a little dark pool where it strikes. Coming straight toward me with a slow drip, drip. I can just make them out from the shadows in the room. What is it?

I raise the knife, with the point at my breast. I am listening, for the last time, to the gay sound of voices in the street outside—to the clatter of cars. It is growing darker.

"Ah! I see you now. Victor! You fiend! It is you!"

