

TERROR TALES



Volume Nine

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Number Two

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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When the Banshee Calls--

Would Kathleen O'Doul hear the sound of the Banshee's wail to summon her back to life—or was she doomed to remain in that gruesome crypt with the dead who would not die!



by Wayne Rogers

Do You Want to Know how a Corpse Feels, Mouldering in the Grave? Read This Daring Novelette of Weird, Bizarre Menace!

CHAPTER ONE

Wail of Death

THE bright sunshine of an early summer morning bathed Forty-second Street as Kathleen O'Doul hurried toward the Grand Central Station—and yet she shivered and a queer electric



tingle crept over her body. For her the sun had no warmth, no penetrating power. Something had shut her away from it, isolated her; something that grotesquely changed everything around her and made the commonplace appear strange and distorted—something that clutched at her with cold, chilling fingers.

Desperately she strove to deny it—but she knew that that something was the fear of death, the lowering threat of doom. Death that, yesterday, had seemed so remote, so far from her world. Now it was at her elbow; had taken possession of her every thought

As she took her seat in the train that would speed her home to Scarborough she felt as if she were riding straight into the embrace of its icy, lethal arms.

Strive as she would, she could not shake that depressing chill from her; could not drive out of her mind the memory of her Uncle Danton's terrifying words as they had come to her quaveringly over the telephone.

"I want you back home before I go, Kathleen," he had pleaded. "I want to see you again before I die. 'Twon't be long now, I know that; my hours are numbered. The banshee has come for me—and I didn't see nor hear her. That means my time has come—"

The banshees—well Kathleen knew the old Irish legend that had been a terrifying family tradition all through her childhood. Often she had listened, wide-eyed, to tales of those fearsome messengers from the other world who supposedly appear to herald the approach of death for members of Ireland's noble families. Others, ran the belief, could see the weird creatures and hear their terrible cries—only to the victim was their presence unknown, neither seen nor heard.

Family tradition had it that all of the O'Douls for countless generations had been summoned in that manner. In prosaic, matter-of-fact New York, far away from her ancestral home and its associations, it had been easy to laugh at the story which once had filled her with such alarm—and yet, now that the dread summons actually had come, now that her uncle was convinced he was doomed, all of the old terror crept back into her brain; all of the instilled belief and fear that had been bred into the very marrow of her bones.

The banshee had come for Uncle Danton, and with it came a chilling reminder of the other half of the O'Doul tradition; when a male member of the family died, a female soon must follow him!

That was nonsense, too, Kathleen had

scoffed. Coincidence, perhaps; but nothing more. Yet in her own lifetime she had seen the tradition fulfilled twice. When her Uncle Gerald had died, his wife, an invalid, had followed him within a week but Margaret O'Doul had been on the verge of death anyway, and the shock of her husband's passing had been too much for her. Again, when Kathleen's own father had died, he had been followed less than a month later by her older sister, Evelyn, who had been thrown by a horse. But, again, Evelyn always had been a reckless rider and many had predicted such an end to her horsemanship.

Coincidence; nothing more—and yet, as she stared unseeing out of the train window, Kathleen could not help remembering that she and her Uncle Danton were the last of the O'Douls. If Danton O'Doul died, she would be the only female member of the family left to follow him to the grave . . .

Kathleen felt a clammy chill shuddering through her—felt it clutching at her heart, stealing into her brain. Frantically she tried to shake off the ghastly feeling of calamity, of unholy evil, that obsessed her. Determinedly she struggled to change her thoughts, to force them into other channels—but death seemed to be all around her; seemed to be whispering to her from every side.

And then resolutely she closed her consciousness to the voices; buried herself in her own depressing thoughts until the train pulled into her station.

FOR a moment the familiar scene cheered her, flooded her with pleasant memories—but they soon vanished as she looked around for old Michael Flaherty, the family chauffeur, and didn't find him. That was strange. Old Michael should have been on hand waiting for her with the limousine. Certainly someone should be there to meet her and drive her the nine miles to Scarborough.

Uneasily she paced the length of the platform—and suddenly froze in mid-stride. Instead of Michael's familiar, wrinkled old countenance she had caught a glimpse of a face that stabbed into her heart and brought back all the persistent premonitions of disaster that had been weighing down upon her; a glimpse of eyes that stared into hers searchingly—and then were gone as another man approached her, smiling and with both hands extended.

"Sorry I didn't get here quite in time, Kathleen," he apologized as he took her bags. "That old bus of mine isn't what it used to be."

Kathleen looked up into the handsome, dark-eyed face of Paul Gillespie, her uncle's secretary—but she hardly saw him as the startling vision of that other briefly glimpsed face filled her mind's eye. That face—the face of George Leland, the man who had been Danton O'Doul's secretary before Gillespie. That was nearly five years ago.

The last time she had seen George Leland she had been held close in his arms, had heard his voice huskily whispering words of love into her ear, had felt his lips crushing eagerly against her own—and two days after that her uncle had discovered the amazing inroads his secretary had made on the O'Doul estate. Had discovered that George Leland's speculations amounted to thousands of dollars!

Leland had gone to the penitentiary for that; had been sent away swearing vengeance against Danton O'Doul for having him arrested and prosecuted. And now he was back—unless her eyes had deceived her in that brief glimpse. But she knew that they hadn't; the terrifying thrill that had coursed all through her body, down to the very tips of her fingers, was no mistake. It was the instinctive reaction which nobody but George Leland, the thief who had betrayed his trust, ever had been able to arouse in her . . .

"But," she heard herself saying to Gillespie, "where is Michael? Why did you have to come for me, Paul?"

Gillespie's face clouded as he held open the door of his coupe.

"Michael is—er—dead," he told her as gently as possible.

"Dead!" The word dropped from her lips almost soundlessly as she stared at him—and again she felt the icy fingers at the back of her neck.

"He was killed a week ago driving back from the Junction," Gillespie nodded. "Must have dozed at the wheel, as well as we've been able to figure. He missed the turn at the top of Slater's Hill—went right through the railing and over the edge—"

Old Michael was dead! Kathleen's stunned brain tried to grasp that; and the chill mantle of doom seemed to fold more closely around her. Michael, the old man who had been like one of the family all her life, was gone—and now her uncle. . . .

"What is this nonsense about Uncle Danton?" she burst out impetuously as Gillespie started the car. "What happened, Paul?"

Gillespie's eyes were fixed on the road. He kept them glued to the windshield as he answered, and his voice was troubled and uncertain.

"I wish I could be sure it is just nonsense," he said, almost to himself, "but the trouble is, I was there—I saw it myself; and he didn't. Two days ago—we had been down in the village all afternoon at a session of court. It was dusk when we started back to the house, and your uncle invited four or five friends to come up for a drink. We were almost to the house—just turning into the grounds—when a weird looking woman stepped out of the shrubbery and stood at the edge of the path. At least I thought it was a woman—and so did the others.

"She was almost naked—and her body shone with a queer translucent light.

Something about her gave me the creeps—something about the eerie way her limbs gleamed through the cloth. I remember I stopped and gaped at her—and then she let out a scream that made my hair stand on end. The most frightful wail I ever heard—and then she was gone, just as if she had been a motion picture projection that suddenly was switched off.

"I was still standing there and gaping dumbly when I caught your uncle's eyes upon me. He had walked right ahead as if nothing had happened—didn't turn around until he realized that he was alone; that the rest of us were all standing there like graven images. But the minute he saw our faces he seemed to know.

"Before I could stop him, Jim Armstrong began to babble something about spooks, and then the others were all talking, all comparing what they had seen. Your uncle just stood there and looked at them, listening to every word—and I could see his face getting paler and paler.

"'It was the banshee,' he said quietly. 'I was looking right ahead of me, and I saw and heard nothing. That means my time has come. Like my ancestors, the banshee has come for me.'"

"I tried to argue him out of that; tried to tell him that we must have imagined we saw the thing—that perhaps it was some little trick of lighting that deceived us. But he knew better. He just smiled and said that he was content—and since then he has been making preparations for his death. It's uncanny, Kathleen—watching a man who seems to be in perfectly sound health getting ready to die—"

"It is nonsense!" Kathleen insisted desperately. "Nothing but superstitious nonsense that went out of fashion a hundred years ago. There are no banshees—"

But at that moment she caught Paul Gillespie's eyes upon her; warm, admiring eyes that were filled with concern—and the uneasy doubt that was mirrored in them wormed its way into her brain and

filled her with nameless apprehension . . .

DANTON O'DOUL was there in the doorway of the big house when she stepped out of the car and sprang up the front steps. His arms were open for her and held her close while he patted her shoulder and kissed her hair. Great God! He was trying to comfort her—that was it; he was treating her as if it were her doom that had been pronounced by the banshee apparition!

And in that moment she knew why Danton O'Doul was an old man; he was no longer afraid of death—but he did not want her to die; and he knew that she was doomed with him!

The fear of death was more inescapable than ever; seemed to be pressing in upon her from all sides of the gloomy old mansion—and there was no denying the change in her uncle. A thin but sturdy old man, he had aged alarmingly. All the color was gone from his cheeks; even the flesh had fallen away so that there were sunken, cavernous hollows beneath the deep sockets of his eyes. All the virility seemed to have left him. His hands trembled, and even his touch was cold and lifeless—the touch of a corpse!

Later, at dinner, Kathleen thought the ghastly meal would never end, but at last it was over and she was sitting in the great, old-fashioned living room that she had known since childhood. That old, familiar room—and yet even it was indefinitely changed; as if the touch of death already was upon it, transforming it, estranging it.

"You *mustn't* give way to such thoughts, Uncle Dan," she pleaded, as she sat in a chair next to his and patted his hand. "You are making yourself ill—making yourself believe impossible things that can't be true—"

Danton O'Doul's slow, patient smile stopped her.

"You are young, Kathleen lass," he

shook his head gently. "There are things you do not know—things you have not seen. When you are older you will understand about the banshee, even though you may never see them yourself. I saw them twice. When they came for your father—a dozen of us witnessed that manifestation, but Denis would not believe us; he had not seen and he had not heard—"

Suddenly his words were drowned out by an eerie, blood-curdling scream from outdoors—a terrible, haunting wail that seemed to come through the window panes as if they were not there!

Kathleen felt her blood run cold, felt her cheeks draining, an invisible hand clutching at her throat. Numb with terror, her gaze flashed to where Paul Gillespie sat, his face taut, his eyes wide with horror, staring fixedly out of the window. Her eyes followed his—and she could feel them widening, could feel them fairly popping out of her head!

There, in the deeper shadow of a clump of tall bushes near the house, stood the figure of a woman—of a well matured girl. A girl with a supernaturally pallid face that was framed in a halo of bright red hair; a girl whose luminescent limbs gleamed weirdly through the transparent, veil-like garments that were her only clothing. Her arms were outstretched, luscious pointed breasts, quivering and taut, and from her open lips came a repetition of that wailing scream that was like the last despairing moan of a lost soul.

The banshee—come to sound the doom of the O'Doul!

"And then there was your grandfather, my father," Danton O'Doul went on softly, in that reminiscent, far-off tone. "He was standing out there on the porch with his family gathered around him when the banshee stepped out of the bushes—"

He was staring right at that glowing creature—and he did not see her! His

voice had not faltered, had not raised—*because he did not hear that frightful scream!*

Danton O'Doul was entirely oblivious to his unearthly visitant—until he glimpsed their set faces, read the terror in their eyes. Without a word he arose and walked to the window, stood there looking out into the deepening darkness. Then he turned back to them and shook his head resignedly—and Kathleen knew that he had seen and heard nothing!

"He is doomed!" something screamed madly in her brain. "And you are doomed with him!"

CHAPTER TWO

Ghoul's Visit

"I AM an old man," Danton O'Doul said quietly as he sank back into his seat. "My time has come, and I am satisfied, but—" a flash of concern lit up the depths of his dark blue eyes "you are the last of the O'Douls, Kathleen—and I do not want our line to die. I want it to go on—after I am gone.

"You know the tradition. You know that you will be in great danger after I have passed on. But there is hope for you—hope until the banshee comes for you. There is hope—but you will need constant watching and protection. You will need a man at your side, Kathleen—someone to look after you. That is why I want to see you married before I go. I want to see you married to Paul. He is a good man and he loves you—and when I know that you are his wife I can die in peace."

His voice had sunk to little more than a whisper; was almost drowned by the sound of Kathleen's sobs as she knelt beside him and buried her face in his lap. She had been afraid that he might make that request; had feared it the moment she heard his plea over the telephone.

Not that she disliked Paul Gillespie. She did not; on the other hand, she was fond of him and believed that in time she might learn to love him—but at that moment she did not hold for him the feeling a bride should have for her husband. And yet—to refuse a dying man's request . . .

Gillespie was standing at the window and Kathleen felt his eyes upon her, caught their signal and knew that he wanted to speak to her. Excusing herself for a moment, she followed him into the hallway.

"I know, Kathleen," he said simply, understandingly, as he took her hand in his and looked deep into her eyes. "I know just how you feel—about me. But I'm afraid he may be right; I'm afraid he may not be with us much longer—and we can make him happy by humoring him. I love you, Kathleen," he drew her close, and she could feel his heart pounding with the stress of his emotion. "I hope I am going to be able to make you love me—but, until that time comes, our marriage need be only a formality—"

This was so different from the romance and culminating marriage she had dreamed of; so different from the way it should be. Involuntarily her lips opened and words hesitated on them—words of gentle refusal; but at that moment Danton O'Doul stood framed in the living room doorway, silhouetted against the light so that he looked like a specter—a specter with great, pleading eyes.

Hardly knowing that she did so, Kathleen heard herself murmuring a hesitant acceptance; felt herself in Paul's arms as his lips pressed against her forehead; saw the beaming delight that lit up her uncle's face.

After that the thing was out of her hands. Danton O'Doul and Paul made all the preparations, and within an hour the wedding party was gathered before a justice of the peace in the center of the living room. A travesty of a wedding ceremony,

Kathleen shuddered, as she stood beside the man who was to be her husband. A ceremony witnessed only by her uncle, who was convinced that he was on the brink of the grave; by old Theresa Flaherty, Michael's widow, whose white face and unrelieved black dress made her look like one of death's hand-maidens; and by Cecelia, the Flahertys' adopted daughter, garbed like Theresa in funeral black.

Kathleen surprised a look of deep pity in the girl's eyes. Cecelia knew the O'Doul traditions, and nothing could dispel her belief in them. She knew that Danton O'Doul was doomed—and that this unwilling bride would soon follow him to the grave!

Somehow Kathleen went through that ceremony. Somehow it was over and her husband was kissing her, the others were congratulating her, and then, as she stood at the foot of the stairs, her Uncle Danton gave her his blessing—a blessing that sounded oddly like a farewell.

With his curious words still ringing in her ears, she went up to her room—to throw herself on the bed, and to think, think, think. To wonder about that unearthly banshee apparition; to recall that momentary glimpse of George Leland's face; to puzzle over old Michael's death.

The death of the old retainer had depressed Danton O'Doul far more than his own approaching demise. For years the Flahertys had served the O'Douls; for generations they had taken care of the O'Douls from birth until death—and now, old Danton had mourned, there would be nobody to "do the last service" for him.

Kathleen knew what that "last service" was—and she buried her face in the pillow as she shivered away from the ghastly thought. . . .

PAUL GILLESPIE was tapping on her door when she awoke in the morning—and one glance at his pale, stricken face was sufficient to tell her his message. Sor-

rowfully he nodded his head in confirmation as she sprang out of bed and tried to voice the question that was on her lips.

"He died during the night," he said softly. "Peacefully. Nobody heard him. Nobody knew until Cecelia found him a little while ago."

Like an automaton she dressed and went downstairs to gaze at the ashen-white face; to listen while the local physician gave his verdict.

"Heart failure," he decreed—but the tone of his voice betrayed that he had reached that diagnosis for want of a better. "Strange," he shook his head puzzledly; "there was nothing the matter with him. He just gave up living—just died because he knew that he would—"

And again the weird old family tradition clutched Kathleen in its terrifying grip and confronted her with this demonstration of its supernatural potency. Danton O'Doul had died because he knew that he would die—under that dismaying declaration her skepticism wavered; but she would *not* let herself believe that there was anything supernatural about it!

Psychology, she assured herself feverishly, that was the answer. Her uncle had been an old man, and he simply had hurried his death by his psychological reaction to this thing he believed so firmly. . . .

A hundred times that day she was thankful for Paul Gillespie. He took care of everything; summoned the local undertaker and supervised the funeral preparations and was a source of comfort and strength to her. At last the slow-dragging daylight hours were past and she went to bed for the night—only to toss fitfully and wake up half a dozen times.

One of those times she sat bolt upright in bed, certain that she had heard a noise downstairs—a queer noise that seemed to stand her hair on end and bead her limbs with chilling perspiration. There it was again—the hardly distinguishable sound of slithering footsteps!

Kathleen listened tensely—and grisly horror clutched at her throat. Her uncle's corpse was down there alone in the living room—unembalmed, as he had directed and as was traditional with her family.

The O'Douls for countless generations had insisted on going to their Maker just as they died; but the fear of awakening after burial had been strong in them ever since one of their ancestors was disinterred and discovered to have died horribly in his grave after coming back to life in his coffin. So strong was that fear that it had become traditional that, before being buried, a dagger must be thrust through the heart of every O'Doul corpse.

That was to have been old Michael's "last service"—but Michael was dead; and now there was somebody downstairs there in the room with the corpse!

Quaking with terror, and yet unable to hold herself back, Kathleen got out of bed and started down the stairs on noiselessly padding bare feet. Fearfully, up from the darkness below, came those horror-fraught sounds—and then, midway down the broad flight, she froze where she stood as the still night was ripped by a shrill shriek and a rasping gurgle; by an appalling commotion down there in the room of death!

Some inner power over which she had no control tore her free of the coma which gripped her; sent her racing downstairs on legs that threatened to buckle beneath her; sent her bursting into the candle-lighted death room—to find old Theresa stretched out on the floor beside the open casket with a sharp kitchen knife plunged deep into her bosom!

Beside her knelt Cecelia, moaning helplessly and trying futilely to staunch the stream of blood that was dyeing the old woman's dress and pooling on the floor. That much Kathleen glimpsed in a startled split-second—and in the same instant her eyes flashed to the partly open French window; flashed in time to catch sight of

a face that was barely distinguishable in the dim light penetrating the panes, and then was gone. The tight-lipped, cold-eyed face of George Leland!

"He did it—George Leland—he killed her!" Cecelia moaned as she rocked back and forth above the corpse of her foster-mother. "We heard a noise in here, so we came to see what it was—and we caught him just as he was going to stick a knife into Mr. O'Doul's body. Mother tried to stop him—and he plunged the knife into her instead. Before I could grab him he ran across the room and jumped out of the window."

Reeling with horror, Kathleen turned to the corpse of her uncle—and saw that the coat and vest had been opened, the shirt unbuttoned and drawn aside to bare the still breast for the ghoul's knife!

CHAPTER THREE

The Grave Awaits

THE next day the body of Danton O'Doul was carried to the big, crumbling old family burial vault and placed on a stone shelf with the moldering bones of his ancestors—while Sheriff Ott scoured the countryside for George Leland. The last glimmer of hope that she and Cecilia might have been wrong died in Kathleen's breast when the officer verified Leland's presence in the county.

"He's out on parole," Ott growled. "Feller saw him over in the Junction day before yesterday—headin' this way. So there's not much doubt about who killed Mrs. Flaherty. He's hidin' out somewhere in the hills, but we'll corner him pretty quick."

In vain Kathleen tried to understand the ghastly scene she had interrupted; tried to understand why George Leland should want to vent his spite on an insensate corpse. She shuddered away from the picture in horror—though, at the same

time, she admitted to herself that she did not want to see Leland captured and brought back to face a murder trial. . . .

Ten days passed without news of the fugitive; ten days during which she was kept busy with legal formalities in connection with taking over the wealthy O'Doul estate. There was no will to be probated; the estate automatically reverted to her on her uncle's death, under the terms of her father's will, which had given Danton the use of the property during his lifetime, to be held intact in trust for Kathleen.

Again Paul Gillespie proved an invaluable aid and companion, an understanding and thoughtful wooer rather than a husband. He did his utmost to take her mind off the tragedies that had descended upon the house, but Kathleen had little opportunity to forget them.

Pitying eyes surrounded her, pity that sent tentacles of horror worming into her brain; reminding her again that Danton O'Doul was dead and that it was the way of her family that when a male died a female must shortly follow him into the Great Beyond. . . .

Although they tried to veil it from her, Kathleen read that thought in the eyes of Paul and Cecelia; sensed it in the watchful care they lavished upon her. It was as if death hovered all around her and could be averted only by their eternal vigilance. Death—it became a mania with her; a devastating fear that she sensed but only half-understood.

And then one night that fear became concrete.

She and Paul were alone in the living room; were going through a sheaf of papers that were piled up on the desk that had been her uncle's.

"This," Paul explained as he unfolded a crisply crackling document, "is an option Danton took on the Four Corners property near Waring Junction. If, as he thought, the new state road comes through

there the property should more than—"

In mid-sentence his words died, withered away in a catch of breath that was a half-strangled gasp. Quickly Kathleen's glance darted at him, and she saw that he was staring, petrified, out of the window.

Instantly her glance followed his—but through the broad pane she could see nothing but the blackness of the night. Cold terror stole into her heart as she realized what that must mean—and then her hair stood on end and she leaped from her chair as a shrill scream pealed through the room to the accompaniment of smashing china!

Standing in the doorway, shaking with terror, was Cecelia, the tea tray she had been carrying tumbled on the floor in front of her, while she too stared, goggle-eyed, out into that empty darkness!

"It's nothing, Kathleen," Paul was the first to recover himself. "I'm getting jumpy as a cat. Cecelia almost popped me out of my skin with that crash." He tried desperately to pretend that he had seen nothing.

"I'm sorry," Cecelia took her cue, as she evaded Kathleen's eyes and started to pick up the broken shards of china with trembling fingers. "I must have slipped—must have tripped in the doorway—"

But Kathleen knew that they were lying. She knew beyond question that Paul had been startled into silence before Cecelia dropped her tray; knew that the maid's frightened scream had come before the crash. They were deliberately trying to deceive her—but when, half an hour later, Paul kissed her good night his arms betrayed him. They enfolded her with a new tenderness, with a half-frantic clutch that whispered stark terror into her brain!

They had seen something out there in the night. Either they had seen George Leland prowling in the darkness—or they had seen the banshee! No matter how indistinct Leland might have been, she should have been able to distinguish him

if he was visible to both Paul and Cecelia—but if it was the banshee, and she had neither seen nor heard. . . .

THAT eerie terror gnawed at Kathleen continually during the next few days. The banshee had come for her—she knew that, even though Paul would not admit it; even though he laughed at her fears. The banshee had come for her—just as the unearthly summons had come to all of the O'Douls; just as it had come to her Uncle Danton. The banshee had come—and the cold breath of death was already on her cheek. . . .

Kathleen knew that—and then she found proof indisputable!

"A walk in the hills will do you good," Paul had suggested that morning. "Suppose we go on a camera hunt?"

His prescription had proved excellent, and Kathleen had all but forgotten her omnipresent fear as they clambered up and down hillsides, in and out of glades, seeking exceptional views and lovely groupings. By noon they had stumbled onto an idyllic little glen with a romantic looking cave mouth at its farther end.

"There's a made-to-order setting!" Paul exulted, as he started down the hillside, one hand helping Kathleen, the other holding the camera ready. "A photographer's dream!"

But suddenly she felt his fingers close spasmodically on her arm; glanced up and saw that he was staring, wide-eyed, at the cave mouth—staring at nothing that she could see!

"What is it, Paul?" Terror stabbed into her brain and spewed the startled words from her paling lips. "*What is it?*"

She did not need his answer; she knew already what he had seen—knew despite his valiant attempts at denial. Instantly he realized that she had caught him, and did his best to cover up his slip—but Kathleen wasn't listening to his protestations. She was staring down at the camera in

his hand; was staring at the snapshot lever. She was sure that it had been up, and now it was down. In his startled surprise he had snapped a picture—snapped a picture with the lens pointed straight at that cave mouth where he had seen something that had been invisible to her!

Before he suspected her purpose she took the camera from him and wound the rest of the film until it was all past the lens, all on the spool ready to be developed.

"I know, Paul," she said quietly. "I know what you saw—and I want to be with you this evening when you develop this film."

Gillespie tried to protest, tried to talk her out of the idea, but she was determined, and she was at his side when he stepped into the little darkroom he had equipped next to the living room.

In the dimly red-lighted cubbyhole they bent over the tanks in which he washed the film; watched the milk-white of the gelatin fading as the negative came through—and then stared at the unmistakable outline of a luminous female figure in front of the cave! An almost naked girl with her mouth wide open to send forth an ululating cry!

The banshee, standing there in the cave entrance!

Shaking with fear, Kathleen groped for the door and stumbled out into the lighted living room—the room that soon would be her death chamber when her lifeless body was stretched out there in its coffin!

Paul did his best to comfort her. His arms were around her, holding her close; his lips were caressing her hair, were pressed against her cheek—but it seemed that nothing could bring the warmth of life back into her trembling body.

Even when she had gone to bed, she lay there shivering; lay tossing endlessly, staring with sleepless eyes into the fearsome darkness—staring at something in-

credible; staring unblinkingly, until her burning eyeballs seemed ready to pop out of their sockets!

The dim rectangle of the bedroom's French window held her eyes like a magnet. Across the balcony in front of that window a slow-moving figure was making its way, clearly revealed in the light of the rising moon. God, it couldn't be true—but that figure—that figure was her dead Uncle Danton, whose disintegrating body lay on a stone shelf in the family burial vault!

Kathleen could not move a muscle, and yet she felt her knees drawing up; felt her feet drawing back, pushing her, frantically pushing her away from that ungodly sight! She felt her mouth open, felt her lips stretch wide. Endlessly they seemed to remain that way, distended but soundless—and then a piercing scream blasted from them, and she knew that her nerves were snapping; that she was giving way to wild hysteria!

In the midst of that mad outburst the door of her room flew open and Paul rushed in. For a moment he stood staring at her; then he whirled and was gone—to return immediately with a pitcher of water.

Waves of blackness—the blackness of death?—were sweeping over her as she fought frantically to cling to consciousness. But she was slipping, was going down—and Paul was there at her side, was propping her in his arms as she went under.

He was still there, was holding a glass to her lips when she blinked her eyes open again and gasped for air. Feverishly she gulped the liquid he gave her, but the relief it brought her was only temporary; the chill of death was upon her, was overcoming her. She could feel it stealing through her limbs, numbing her extremities, freezing her.

She was dying—and as her heavy lidded eyes closed she had the horrible

impression that Paul was gloating down at her; that hellish satisfaction was unmistakable on his triumphant face!

CHAPTER FOUR

Sleep of Death

WHEN Kathleen knew anything again, she was lying there in bed—was lying there strangely still. The darkness had faded, and in its place had come a great quietness; a hushed quiet that faintly resounded in her ears. An awful quiet that was appalling in its intensity; that she *must* break—even if only by the sound of her own voice.

But when she tried to speak her lips would not move. Her tongue was a dead thing. Her arms, her legs, her fingers, her toes, even her eyes—frantically she tried one after the other, but not a muscle would move. She was paralyzed, helpless from head to foot. *She was dead!* But, no—she could not be, for she was conscious of what was going on around her. She could hear—could hear footsteps coming into the room; could hear voices. And she could feel—could feel hands moving over her body; could feel a cold instrument pressed to her chest over her heart.

"She is dead," a voice pronounced beside her bed—the doctor's voice, she recognized. "Heart failure," he said slowly, thoughtfully. "Her heart must have been weak—unable to stand the shock and the ordeal of the past two weeks."

But she *wasn't* dead! She should be dead, she knew, but she *wasn't!* Couldn't they see that? Couldn't they see that she was alive; was striving to speak to them and tell them so?

Helplessly she had to lie there and hear them leave; had to lie there in the terrible stillness for what seemed an endless time—until another man entered the room and closed the door behind him.

The elderly Scarsborough undertaker—she recognized him as he turned her head so that she could catch a glimpse of his face from beneath her almost closed eyelids—and shuddering terror coursed through her; filled her agonized mind with horrors of every description. She was alive, but he thought that she was dead—and God only knew what terrible things he would do to her, thinking her nothing more than a corpse!

Surely he must feel how her muscles were quivering, how her nerves were tingling with dread!

But he felt nothing. He stripped her nightgown from her body—and was totally unconscious of the blushes she thought must be crimsoning her flesh as she lay nude before him. Quite as oblivious to her shame as to her terror, he went about the task of dressing her, of lifting her and placing her in the casket which he and his assistant brought into the room.

They were carrying her downstairs, were setting up her casket in the living room—and tomorrow they would take her out for burial. Tomorrow they would entomb her alive—would seal her up in the burial vault with her uncle's decomposing body! Would leave her there, to die horribly—to suffocate or to starve to death when she came out of this coma; to waste away after days and days of frightful, hopeless agony!

The way her head was tilted back on the silken pillow in the casket she could see through a narrow opening between the lids of both eyes. Could see Paul, her husband, come into the room and stand beside the coffin; could see him looking down into her face as his hand molded her breast and felt for a heart-beat beneath it.

There was no heart-beat—but surely he must feel something! Surely he must see that she was alive!

But he didn't. He turned away and left her alone—left her to count the long hours of the day, the endless hours of the

night, until the sun came up again to usher in her burial day!

That morning was a ghastly nightmare; so incredibly horrible that she felt she must go insane—must leap out of the casket a ranting, raving maniac. To lie there and watch the villagers come in and file past her bier, to hear a prayer being offered over her before the top of the casket was closed to shut her into eternal darkness, to feel the coffin being lifted and carried out, carried up the hill to the O'Doul burial vault—to lie there and be able to do nothing; that was mental agony unendurable!

NOW they were at the door of the vault. She could hear the heavy metal hasp grating as the door was unlocked. The grave was open to receive her—this was her last chance! She *must* find her voice; *must* speak before it was too late—but her frenzied efforts were useless. She felt the jar and the grating as the casket was set down on one of the shelves and then wedged into place. She heard the departing footsteps of the mourners and pallbearers—and then the heavy door clanged shut with awful finality.

The world had turned away from her; had left her there to die horribly in her imprisoning casket. . . .

Time meant nothing to her after that—an eternity of deathly stillness that was unbroken by the tiniest fragment of sound. An eternity of pitch blackness and hushed quiet that stabbed at her eyeballs and rang soundlessly against her eardrums—an endless aeon of time that was broken at last by a faint scraping and crunching; by the slither of what must be footsteps!

Kathleen strained to hear until it seemed her head must burst with effort. The slithering sound was coming nearer and nearer; seemed to be right beside her. It was! Now she could hear the tread of footsteps; footsteps that came closer and

seemed to stop right beside her casket. She could hear fingers fumbling with the screws that secured the top of the casket; heard it opening and saw the yellow light of a lantern that stood in a flower niche beside her.

Light that outlined the face of her deliverer. The face of Paul, her husband—but in that moment of overwhelming relief a new terror suddenly convulsed her. Paul held something long and shiny in his hand. A dagger! He did not know that she was alive. He thought that she was dead—and he had come to the tomb to do the "last service" for her—to plunge that gleaming dagger through her heart!

Merciful God! Was there no way to stop him—no way to reach his consciousness before that deadly point sheathed itself in her breast?

Frantically she strained to move a muscle, to twitch an eyelid, to do anything that might give him a hint that she was alive, as he opened the front of her dress and bared her breasts. With maddening deliberation his fingers felt over her skin—but he did not understand! He was seeking a spot for the fatal thrust—and then he had found it, just under the white hillock of her left breast!

The sharp point stabbed into her flesh, hesitated a moment—and then the dagger drove home!

But instead of the death she expected, it brought her life! Life that ran through her veins and filled them with a myriad of sharpstinging needles; life that made her limbs tingle and that gradually restored control of her paralysis-shackled muscles!

PAUL'S arms were around her as she stirred, as she moved a hand, raised an arm. He helped her as she struggled to sit up in the casket. Naked to the waist, she cowered there in his embrace as he pressed her close to him and covered her lips with avid kisses.

Only then did she see that the "dagger" with which he had stabbed her was a hypodermic needle, a needle loaded with some drug that had freed her from the trance that had held her immobile.

"Darling—Kathleen darling," Paul was whispering into her ear. "You have been denying me too long, but now you *are* my darling. Now you are mine—all mine—"

His breath was hot on her cheek as his lips again sought hers; his eyes were flaming with wild desire. His hands were stealing over her body, beneath her breasts, down her naked sides, as he started to lift her out of the casket—but at that moment a wild-eyed man leaped out of the darkness of the doorway and sprang at him!

Like a raging demon the attacker whipped his arms around Paul and flung him away from the casket; flung him to the opposite side of the tomb—and then, before he could recover, the stranger came charging in again with his head down and flailing fists that battered Paul back mercilessly.

Kathleen heard her husband curse, heard him cry out in terror as those brutal fists pummeled his face. She saw him rally desperately and fling himself forward—but a wicked blow that seemed to snap his spine caught him under the jaw and crashed him off his feet; lifted him clear of the floor and slammed him, senseless, against the opposite row of shelves.

Panting and glaring at his fallen victim, the conqueror stood beside the casket—where Kathleen, too stupefied to move, sat staring at his grimy face. George Leland! Amazement and terror rioted through her as she recognized him—but he was gripping her arm, was panting something that didn't make sense. Something about a plot to kill her and grab her estate—something about her uncle and Paul. . . .

The words penetrated her dazed mind, but she could not understand them. Mean-

ingless words from a savage killer—from the man who had murdered old Theresa—and now had added Paul to his list of victims!

Kathleen shrank away from him; tried to tear loose from his grip and get out of the casket—but he held her tightly, and his face was close to hers, his eyes burning into hers with terrible intensity.

"I know—you don't understand," he snapped as he shook her like a child, "but there's no time now for explanations. We must get out of here immediately or it will be too late. At any moment—"

His arms were around her, forcing her out of the casket, lifting her down to the floor—but before he could turn and lead the way to the door a pair of baleful eyes gleamed at him out of the darkness and a club came down with sickening force on the top of his head. With a low moan of pain he crumpled to the floor—and behind him Kathleen saw the grinning face of her Uncle Danton!

CHAPTER FIVE

Doom's Fulfillment

DANTON O'DOUL—that was impossible! Kathleen stared at him in incredulous amazement. But there he was, very much alive, and smirking at her with a face that was transformed—transformed by the Devil! For a moment he stood over George Leland, glanced down at him, and then tossed the heavy club aside—to exchange it for a revolver that came out of his back pocket and was trained on her stomach.

"Stay right where you are, my dear," he warned. "I don't want to hurt you—no unless you make me do it."

Keeping a wary eye on her, he edged into the darkness at one side of the vault and quickly returned with a coil of rope.

"But—but, Uncle Dan—" the words came with difficulty from Kathleen's dry mouth—"I don't—I don't understand—"

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Danton O'Doul paid no more attention than if she had not spoken. Bending over Paul, he lashed the fallen man's wrists together, then his ankles; and then he went to where George Leland lay and trussed him up in similar fashion. That finished, he changed the position of the lantern, moved it farther toward the rear of the tomb, and bent to scrape away a carpet of dead leaves and dust from the floor.

Under that accumulation he uncovered a big stone slab, fumbled at its edge for a few moments, and then lifted it on one end with remarkable ease. Beneath it yawned a black hole that gave forth a dank, fetid odor—a deep hole from which came the scampering of rats and the slithering of snakes.

Cold with terror, Kathleen watched those ominous preparations, and her eyes swerved fearfully from the black hole to Paul. He had recovered consciousness and was propping himself up in a sitting position.

"Paul!" her lips framed his name soundlessly as her eyes met his.

Even though she knew that he was unable to help her, there was wordless appeal and trust in the look she gave him—but the cold, calculating expression on his face startled her. He ignored her; scarcely seemed to see her. Instead, he turned narrowed eyes upon her uncle; smiled grimly as Danton looked down at him.

"Well, it seems you win—so far, Danton," he admitted. But before coming up here I took several little precautions which may interest you. I'm ready to bargain. If you will kindly remove these ropes—"

But Danton sneered at him, spat at him in disgust.

"*You're* ready to bargain!" the old man sneered. "I'm through bargaining with you, you dirty double-crosser! You thought you could get rid of me and have

the whole estate to yourself, didn't you? But you see I got out of the cellar where you penned me up—and now you're going someplace where I know you *won't* break loose."

Paul threatened, tried to bargain, pleaded—and gradually, to Kathleen's amazed ears, came the truth; the revelation that this whole death-drama had been her uncle's handiwork—that Paul, the man she had married, had been his willing tool, doing his bidding and at the same time planning to double-cross him and grab the whole stake for himself!

A sordid, incredibly fiendish scheme from which she recoiled in horror and loathing. Uncle Danton, the old man she had loved—and Paul, the man she had married and had thought she was beginning to care for . . .

"A pretty sorry tale, isn't it, Kathleen?" George Leland's voice sounded from the other side of the tomb; and she saw that he had rolled over so that he faced them. "Two thieves trying to outwit each other in their scheming to rob and murder a helpless girl! I discovered old Danton's crookedness five years ago. That was why he had me arrested and sent away—because I uncovered the thieving manipulations by which he was robbing the estate he was supposed to administer for you. To protect himself, he planted the thefts on me and had me convicted.

"But I promised him I'd come back, and I did. I came back to clear myself, and because—because I still love you as genuinely as I did that night you gave me your promise, Kathleen. I couldn't leave you at the mercy of that old crook. As soon as I was free I came back to Scarborough and started watching him—and it didn't take me long to find out about this devilish plot he was hatching."

Danton O'Doul chuckled delightedly. Arms folded in front of him and the revolver held ready, he leaned back against

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the stone shelves and nodded his head in mocking confirmation.

“**Y**OU looted the estate of all the ready money you could milk from it,” Leland whirled on him, “and then you wanted to sell out the rest of it but couldn’t because it was entailed for Kathleen. To get around that you tricked her into marrying Gillespie and then faked your own death so that she would come into possession of the estate. After that, all you had to do was have her buried alive so that Gillespie, her husband, who would inherit the property, could sell it out and then split the proceeds with you.

“A sweet little program of thievery and murder! Old Michael was the first to be killed, because you knew that he would take part in nothing that was crooked—and that he would faithfully go through with what he considered his duty and drive a knife through the heart of your supposed corpse. When Theresa tried to carry out the obligation her dead husband could not perform, she had to be killed, too—killed with the knife she tried to stab into your black heart!”

“Very good, very good, indeed,” Danton applauded derisively. “You really are quite a detective, George. It’s too bad all your clever discoveries must be wasted—but you will have plenty of time to talk them over with Paul—” as he glanced toward the yawning black pit.

“You can’t get away with it, Danton!” Paul Gillespie screamed desperately. “You’re dead, and the estate belongs to me. You need me alive or you can’t get your hands on a penny of it—don’t forget that!”

“After death comes the resurrection,” Danton O’Doul jeered. “You forget that trait of resurrection that runs in my family. I shall come back from the dead just as my ancestor did—except that, unlike him, I shall escape from the tomb.

WHEN THE BANSHEE CALLS—

That smashed coffin on the floor will tell its own story of my desperate struggle to free myself."

Danton nodding his head with evil satisfaction, "Don't worry about Kathleen,"—she will not embarrass me in the least. Kathleen will remain dead—with a knife through her heart to prevent the possibility of another miraculous resurrection, after I am finished with her. But first she and I—"

His hungry eyes, straying over her half-unclad body, told Kathleen all too eloquently what was in store for her "first"—and the desperation of overwhelming horror prodded her, sent her running wildly toward the door. But Danton was too quick for her. His hand reached out and grabbed her by the shoulder; held her there in a cruel vise while he seized her burial shroud and ripped it from her body, while he plucked at her undergarments and tore them from her.

For a moment his blazing eyes devoured her bestially; then he hurled her brutally to one side of the tomb, where she slumped, dazed and trembling, against the cold rock wall.

Deliberately Danton walked up to Paul and fastened strong fingers in his collar; callously began dragging him toward the open pit.

"No—no!" the doomed man screamed wildly. "You'll never see Cecelia again if you throw me in there! You think she's waiting to go off with you, but I—"

The rest of that sentence was fused into a frenzied shriek as the poor wretch teetered on the edge of the abyss. A heave—and he pitched over into the darkness,

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howling like a lost soul tossed into the depths of hell—until his body thumped against the stone many feet below!

Then silence—ghastly, appalling silence, broken only by the scrape of Danton O'Doul's footsteps as he started toward George Leland.

Kathleen saw that the bound man was struggling frantically to free himself—but she saw, too, that he was making little headway against the ropes that held him securely. Danton reached him, bent over and grabbed him by the collar, started to drag him toward the pit—but Leland put up a terrific battle. His bound body jack-knifed, flailed, pitched and squirmed like a powerful fish being hauled over the side of a boat.

One of these desperate lunges flung his right shoulder sidewise into the back of Danton's knees, knocked the older man off balance, sent him staggering to one side. Danton let out a startled yell and went down—and in an instant Leland was on top of him, was pinioning him with bound arms.

"The door, Kathleen!" he shouted frantically as he fought to hold Danton under him. "Now's your chance! For God's sake—run!"

ON THE very rim of the pit, he was deliberately sacrificing himself for her, struggling only to hold Danton until she could escape—and in that soul-searching moment she knew that there was only one man in her heart; that she had been his ever since that night when he held her in his arms—his no matter what they had said about him, no matter what he had seemed to do. Her man—and her place was with him. . . .

Sobbing wildly, she threw herself into the struggle; grabbed her uncle's arm and tried to pull him away. But he shook off her grip, threw her aside roughly—and he had George almost over the edge!

WHEN THE BANSHEE CALLS—

Her horrified eyes stared, fascinated, at that fearful struggle; stared past the locked bodies—and saw the revolver her uncle had dropped. Hardly knowing what she did, she sprang toward it, grabbed it up, and fired point-blank at him—fired blindly while hysterical tears streamed down her cheeks and her hand trembled so that she could barely hold the gun.

The shot thundered in the rock-walled vault—and Danton O'Doul staggered back from the pit brink. Staggered back with one hand pawing his blinded eyes.

Doggedly he got to his knees, to his feet, and staggered blindly toward the crypt doorway and out into the main vault—and suddenly Kathleen remembered the heavy metal door. If he closed that on them they would be trapped there helplessly, buried alive as surely as if they were six feet under the ground!

Frantically she rushed into the outer tomb and grabbed the heavy door just as it was swinging shut. But Danton's strength was too great for her. The door was closing—and then George was there beside her!

Inching his way across the floor like a snake, he reached the doorway—and thrust his bound body into the aperture; wedged it there so that the door could not be closed.

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TERROR TALES

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Danton O'Doul started to do just that—but he stopped short, stood like a man spellbound, when a wild scream of agony keened through the still night! Only then did Kathleen see that the barn behind the O'Doul mansion was in flames; that the roof was caving in amid a great shower of sparks—and that a fantastic figure was running out of the inferno. A figure almost naked, wrapped in flames as she tore her burning clothing from her body.

For a moment, as she staggered into view, there was a halo of red flames around her head—around the head of Cecelia Flaherty!

That was what Paul Gillespie had meant about Cecelia! It was she who had been Danton's accomplice; she who had been the "banshee"; she with whom he expected to go away when he had pocketed the proceeds of the estate which he could not sell while Kathleen was alive! Paul had known all that—and locking Cecelia up in the barn and setting fire to it was one of the "little precautions" he had taken to double-cross Danton!

Cecelia's body was wrapped in flames, her arms were outstretched gropingly in front of her, and a wail of utter torment came from her open mouth as she staggered up the hill.

In that terrible moment she was an awesome incarnation of the banshee—a banshee sounding the doom of the O'Doul! For as Danton O'Doul went floundering toward her, like his ancestors, he neither saw nor heard the fearsome apparition—the last spark of life had left his body even before it crashed to the ground!

The moments it took to release George Leland seemed endless to Kathleen. Then, at last she found surcease as his lips met hers in a promise of everlasting peace.

THE END