

TERROR TALES



VOLUME TWELVE MAY, 1940 NUMBER TWO

A LONG NOVEL OF WEIRD TERROR

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How could anyone have believed me when I said I had not committed those horrible torture-murders? For they had read the gloating admission of the ghastly crimes—and the handwriting was my own!

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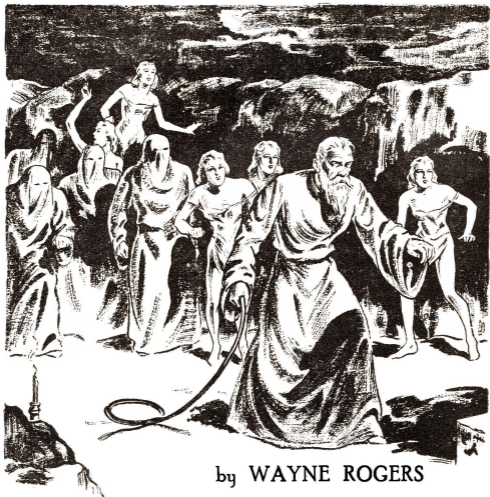
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THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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Where Dwell the Living Dead



by WAYNE ROGERS

I had never loved Leona, but when she died, old Jubel Tandy swore that never should I marry another; that for all eternity I belonged to the spirit of his daughter. And now in that cavern of the damned I watched her long-buried corpse rise up to claim me in the cold white arms of death!

CHAPTER ONE

Vow of Doom

I HAD NOT intended to ask Betty Crandall to marry me that night. I wanted to more than I had ever wanted anything in my life—but I was

not worthy of her, and I knew it. For years my scapegrace escapades had made the name of Wesley Harrison a delight for the tabloid reporters: the irresponsible society playboy who could always be counted on for columns of sensational copy when news was scarce.

And there was my marriage to Leona

*A novelette of the Devil's vengeance upon the
two who disobeyed his commands*



Tandy. That "juke joint" romance had ended with Leona's tragic death, but the disastrous mesalliance was still vivid in my memory—and in the memory of all my acquaintances.

I had no right to ask Betty to marry me, I had told myself a score of times—but the bright North Carolina moon was making a fairyland of the Fayette Valley, and strength of character never had been one of my foremost qualities. I was standing beside her on the wide porch of

our hunting lodge, and suddenly words came unbidden from my lips. Words which she answered incredibly.

"Of course I will, darling," her soft voice throbbed in my ears and set my nerves atingle—and then she was in my arms, and I knew that I had reached the happiest moment of my life; had started

upon a new life that would be dedicated completely to Betty's happiness.

We seemed utterly alone in the world as we clung to each other there in the moonlit darkness. With her soft body held tight in my arms and her blonde head nestling against my shoulder, I looked out across the valley and silently made my pledges. The delicious fragrance of her hair was in my nostrils, titillating my whole being; the thrilling closeness of her head set my blood on fire; my heart was full to overflowing—when suddenly a shaft of memory came out of the night and drove like an icy spear into my very soul.

Across the valley the moonlight was bright on the side of Lawton Lodge, the mountainous outcropping that split Fayette Valley like a great V and divided its western end into two parts. And now the daylight-simulating illumination had reached a point from which the beams were reflected from blocks of spectral marble. The Fayette cemetery.

Those marble blocks were the front of the big Fowler family burial vault—and a few hundred yards away from the vault was the spot where Leona lay in her grave.

As I stared with riveted eyes at that baleful reflection, voices were ringing in my ears, voices that chilled me to the marrow of my bones and covered my limbs with gooseflesh.

"Nothin's ever goin' to part us, darlin'—never. You're mine as long as we live—an' after that we'll sleep together up there on the ridge." That was Leona's voice, in the first hectic days of our romance. And my own maudlin voice was answering her, mouthing thick-tongued promises that meant nothing as I uttered them.

But there was another voice, clear and sonorous.

"We mate only once here in the hills, Harrison!" That was patriarchal old

Jubel Tandy's bitter benediction on my marriage to his daughter. "She is gone from you for a little while, but you belong to her for all eternity—and *I will know if you fail her!*" And that was the last sentence I had heard him utter, as the earth clods thudded down dismally on Leona's coffin. . . .

JUBEL TANDY was a hillman to the core; a white-haired, white-bearded oldster who was so busy looking after the souls of his neighbors that he had no time for his daughter. That was why Leona had haunted the roadhouse in Fayetteville, at the eastern end of the valley, that served as a rural night-club. I had met here there and had conceived an alcohol-inspired infatuation for her that ended in a mad, spur-of-the-moment elopement.

Too late Tandy had tried to prevent that. He had arrived at the preacher's home when the ceremony was finished. Like a venerable patriarch of Biblical days he had suddenly materialized in the doorway, his white beard almost covering his face and trailing down over the black cassock-like robe he wore. Like the knell of doom his grim benediction had boomed out over us—and when I glimpsed the fanatical gleam in his cold blue eyes, unreasoning fear of the man had seeped into me.

The four weeks of my marriage had been a constant nightmare. Once I had sobered up I realized what a ghastly mistake I had made—but then it was too late. Leona had moved into the hunting lodge with me, and I waited for the storm to break when my family should hear of my latest and maddest escapade.

What they might do was very important to me because my mother, by the terms of my father's will, controlled the fortune which eventually would be mine. She could have made it very tough for me had she wanted to, but Emery Wilson, my step-father, went to bat for me

in great shape. That wasn't the first time he had gotten me out of a mess, but this time he could not get me out; he could only help by smoothing things over with mother and by coming down to see that Leona and I got straightened out some way or other.

Leona tried, I'll say that for her; but the gulf between us was unbridgeable. We were both miserable. And then, a month after our marriage, she drove to Fayetteville in my coupe and went off the road at a treacherous turn. She was dead when the wreck was discovered a hundred feet below the broken railing.

The burial was swift. Jubel Tandy lowered her into her grave on Lawton Ridge the next day—and like an implacable avenger he glared at me across the newly built mound.

"Remember your pledge, Harrison," he warned me solemnly. "She is gone from you for a little while, but you are hers for all eternity—and I will know if you fail her!"

An icy trickle ran slowly down my spine as his fanatical eyes bored into mine. For an instant it was as if I stood before a judge and heard him pronounce my doom—and then Tandy was gone, melted into the wilderness that surrounded the little graveyard. But the reverberation of his thinly disguised threat never entirely left my brain—and now, as I held Betty Crandall close in my arms, it echoed again and conjured up before me an eerie foreboding.

I had not seen Jubel Tandy for three years—and yet I was strangely certain that he would know that I intended what he would consider a betrayal of his daughter! In this moment that should have been the happiest of my life a wave of inexplicable fear engulfed me!

I was pledged, shackled for life to that rotting corpse on the ridge—and a fanatical madman would see that I kept my vow. . . .

IT WAS a disturbance in the brush a short distance from the porch that snapped me out of the paralyzing trance that gripped me. A glance revealed that it was only old Duncan Fowler, our caretaker, on his way to his own quarters in a small building at the rear of the lodge. Once Fowler's people had owned all of Fayette Valley; now he was penniless. A hunting club with headquarters on the opposite side of Lawton Ridge controlled the southern spur of the valley, while my family owned most of the northern prong—and Fowler was no more than custodian of the acres that once had been his.

Fowler passed without noticing us, but a moment later a voice hailed us from the lodge living room, and Ted Ballard, my cousin, came striding out onto the porch.

"Don't tell me—I know!" he laughed, as he came up and gripped my hand. "I heard everything—and there could be only one explanation for such a clinch. Congratulations—you pirate!"

It was Ballard who had introduced me to Betty. At that time he had been courting her himself, but he had taken his elimination good-naturedly. Now he led the way inside and whooped for attention so that he could announce our engagement. There were half a dozen other guests, besides my mother and Emery Wilson, and in a few moments Betty and I were the center of a laughing, gayly toasting circle.

In that congenial atmosphere the stark, fanatical gleaming eyes of Jubel Tandy faded, and the haunting resonance of his warning words was drowned in the tinkle of glasses. Long before bedtime I had forgotten all about him—but sleep hardly had come to me when I suddenly was wide awake, every muscle tense, while my scalp drew tighter and tighter on my skull.

There was someone at my window! Someone was stepping in from the roof of the porch. The almost vanished moon-

light fell momentarily on his face—on a nimbus of snowy white hair that seemed to float free of the black-gowned figure beneath it.

Jubel Tandy!

Almost soundlessly he walked across the room and stood close to my bed, his arm uplifted, his accusing finger pointing at me.

"Here in the hills we mate only once," his sepulchral voice intoned. "You belong to Leona and no other shall have you. Send that woman away—alone! Send her away lest the judgment of the hills be visited upon you both!"

He was threatening—threatening Betty!

He had broken into my room to hurl his arrogant warning in my face—and I was lying there and taking it! Hot anger and chilling fear clashed within me as I strove to raise myself and leap out of bed; but my muscles had become numb, leaden things that would not move, even though my desperate efforts brought out beads of perspiration on my forehead. I seemed chained there on the bed, utterly helpless—and Jubel Tandy seemed to know it. Contemptuously he turned his back on me and walked to the window. Gradually he merged with the darkness—and my straining lessened, relaxed, until the fog of sleep came down over me. . . .

It was bright morning when I awoke. For a moment I lay there, swiftly recalling what had occurred during the night just past.

I thrust myself upright and glanced swiftly around the room—and what I saw seemed to freeze the blood in my veins, to make each hair at the nape of my neck stand up straight on end.

There on my bureau, in the frame from which Betty Crandall's lovely face had smiled at me, stood a photograph of Leona I had not seen for years! Leona's dark, accusing eyes reminding me of my lightly-given pledge!

CHAPTER TWO

The Grave Yawns

COLD sweat bathed me from head to foot when I climbed out of bed and lifted that photograph in my trembling hands. In it I read an omen, a harbinger of what was to come, a forecast of the fate that was closing in on my Betty. Now I had no doubt of her danger. That white-bearded maniac would go to any extreme to enforce his made dictum—and even as I fabricated a dozen plans for fighting him I sensed that they were useless.

Betty was too helpless, too vulnerable, too infinitely precious to risk her life against such a fanatic. Flight was our only hope. I must get her away from there as quickly as possible—but I would go with her. In New York she would be safe. There I could laugh at this madman and his threats of a hill judgment.

I must get her away from there quickly—for already I sensed that I was being watched, sensed that unseen eyes were following my every move. I must get her away—but how? How should I explain what must appear to be a strange, capricious whim?

I must see Betty before she went downstairs, must stop her and somehow prevail upon her to trust me and do as I asked without explanation. At the narrowly opened door of my room I waited and watched, stepped out to intercept her the moment she appeared in the hallway.

My face must have betrayed my anxiety, for I saw her cheeks lose their color as she came to me and clutched my arms with both hands.

"What is it, Wesley?" she whispered. "What is the matter? What is going on here? I knew there was something wrong last night out on the porch, when your arms became as hard as steel around me. I saw your face, and it frightened me—and now—"

"It is nothing—nothing that I can explain now," I gulped. "I want you to leave here with me, darling. Today—as soon as we can get away. Never mind why. Please trust me and just go with me."

"Then it was you who was in my room last night?" Her eyes widened in surprise. "You packed my bags—"

"Your bags?" I heard my own voice echo her words tonelessly—but the icy fingers that were closing around my heart gave the answer to my question even before she spoke.

"Someone was in my room last night," she repeated with lips that were bloodless. "This morning my bags were all packed and standing beside the door—everything but my traveling clothes. What is it, Wesley? If you didn't pack them—"

I read the fear that was kindling deep in her hazel eyes—but how could I tell her that Jubel Tandy had packed her bags? How could I tell her that this madman of the hills had risen up to forbid our marriage, to rear the specter of a dead woman in the way of our happiness? I took her in my arms, and my feverish kisses stopped her questions—until suddenly I whirled around, every sense alert.

Again I had felt eyes boring into my back, had heard a sound close behind me. . . . But it was only Ted Ballard stepping out of a side-corridor; Ted Ballard grinning like a loon when he saw my discomfiture. . . .

It took no coaxing to persuade Betty to leave with me; she was even more anxious to get away than I. But taking our leave of the others was more of a task. Emery Wilson would not hear of our going, and Ted Ballard swore that it was only unreasonable jealousy that made me snatch my fiancée away from him. They argued and protested, and it was well into the afternoon before I finally was able to bundle Betty into my coupe and start up the valley.

At last we were getting away; at last we were leaving Jubel Tandy and his hills behind, I told myself with grim satisfaction as I unconsciously pressed down harder on the accelerator. Betty, too, sighed with relief as she sank onto the seat beside me and thrust her hand beneath my arm.

Wordlessly we rolled along the rutted road, and soon I saw that she was beginning to doze. Her head was dropping forward on her chest, and her hand had slipped from under my arm. Her eyes were half-closed—and my own were becoming heavy. . . .

I shook my head and gripped the wheel more tightly—but my fingers felt thick and strangely numb. That numbness was spreading all through my body. I could hardly feel my foot on the accelerator, even when I pressed it down hard. Nor could I lift it from the floor.

THAT is all I can remember distinctly. The car seemed to be going faster and faster, and my eyes were closing. I struggled to keep them open, but there was no feeling in the lids—no feeling in the eyes. I knew that I ought to stop, but my fingers, groping for the switch, were no longer a part of me. They were numb, lifeless adjuncts over which I had no control. . . .

The crash came in a thick fog that blinded me. Dimly I could hear the whine and squeal of rending metal. Like blows delivered with pillow gloves, I could feel the impact as I was hurled forward against the windshield and tumbled about in the overturned car.

After that, my senses cleared. I knew that the car had gone off the road, bounced down a stretch of hillside and overturned. Somehow I managed to crawl out through the window, but I could not take another step. I sank to the ground, completely helpless. I seemed to be paralyzed. No matter how I struggled, I could

not move a muscle—and Betty was somewhere in that wreck, perhaps bleeding to death!

Hours seemed to pass while I lay there, writhing in mental agony, Hours of helplessness—but at last my straining ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Thank God, help was coming at last!

But in the next moment my eager hope died still-born, throttled by the tentacles of icy terror that wrapped around my heart. Into my line of vision strode the newcomer—Jubel Tandy!

For a moment the old man stood over me, gloating. Not even my lips would move, not even my tongue to voice the despairing cry that welled up into my throat—and he knew it.

"So you did not heed my warning; you disobeyed," his voice knifed into my despair. "Instead of sending the woman away, you were going with her. You were going out of the hills to marry her. You cannot be trusted to keep your pledge, so you are going to Leona—now!"

Going to Leona. . . . The madmen intended to murder me! With helpless fascination I watched him—and what I saw was like a knife thrust into my heart, a knife that stabbed and twisted until my whole being was convulsed in agony.

For an instant the black-robed figure bent over the car, and then he lifted Betty from the corner in which her body had been wedged. Her eyes were open, and there was no blood on her face. Thank God, she apparently was unhurt! But the unspoken prayer of thanksgiving was stifled when I saw that, like myself, she had no control over her limbs.

Jubel Tandy propped her up against the top of the overturned car and held her there with one hand while the other stripped off the jacket of her tweed suit. Her jacket—and then his fingers fastened in the neck of her blouse and tore it away in shreds.

For an instant I caught a glimpse of her eyes, pleading eyes that begged for mercy as his clawing fingers reached for her skirt.

My tortured brain reeled away from the horror that I could not shut out of my sight. Cold sweat beaded out on my forehead and on the backs of my hands. The surging, pounding blood threatened to burst from my veins—and suddenly the invisible shackles that bound me snapped. I got to my feet and lurched toward the devil; my hands reached out for him—but his fist smashed into my face, and my knees gave way beneath me.

Billowing black clouds rolled in smotheringly upon me as I dropped to the ground, but merciful unconsciousness was slow in coming. Through half-closed eyes I could see that devil standing over my darling. Above the roaring din that filled my brain I could hear his sonorous voice.

"Those whom God has joined together no man—and no woman—shall put asunder!" he pronounced. "You have interfered, and for that you will be punished—but your punishment will come later."

As he finished, he picked her up and carried her to a thick clump of bushes and stretched her out beneath the shielding branches. Then he came back and took hold of me, grabbed me by the shoulders and dragged me off toward the road—and my swooning senses lapsed entirely. . . .

IT WAS dark when I came back to consciousness. Night—and the moon was just beginning to rise, shedding only the palest radiance through the branches of the trees above me. I was lying on the ground beside a low mound—beside a grave! This was a cemetery, and that scraping, clinking noise that had been registering on my half-conscious brain was the sound of a pick and shovel digging into the earth.

My head swam dizzily and weakness

threatened to overpower me when I sat up, but at least I had regained control of my limbs. Now, as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I began to recognize my surroundings. I was in the Fayette burying ground—must be close to Leona's grave. . . .

There it was, some twenty feet away from me; that open grave with the freshly turned earth piled on all sides around it! Someone was opening Leona's grave—and as I stared in dawning horror the digger came up from the newly excavated hole. For an instant, as he hovered on the grave's brink, the moonlight fell squarely upon the white mane of Jubel Tandy!

That madman was disinterring his daughter's long-dead corpse! His deranged brain had conceived some incredible scheme for reuniting me with Leona! But no—that was not his object. Not until he stood over me and fastened his fingers in the collar of my coat did I realize his horrible intention.

"You are Leona's, and no other shall come between you," he gritted, as he started to haul me toward the grave. "Now you will go to her—and stay with her."

He was going to bury me alive with Leona's corpse!

Stark horror suffused me with newfound strength, galvanized me into action. I fought him desperately, swung my fist at his bearded face as I struggled to tear loose from his grip; but my blow never landed. He side-stepped easily and lashed out at me with punches that rocked my head and sent me floundering backward. Instantly he was after me, closing in and fastening his grip upon me relentlessly.

My frantic struggles were useless; his strength was far too great for me. Unheeding, he dragged me to the grave, pushed me up over the mound of soft earth. For an instant I teetered on the brink, and my horrified eyes stared down into the excavation. In that split-second

I glimpsed the opened top of the pine box that was Leona's coffin, glimpsed something white stretched out in it—and then I was pitching down into the hole, while an involuntary scream tore from my lips!

Hands first, I landed in the coffin—and queasy horror convulsed me as I felt the dry bones of the corpse snapping under my impact! Frantically I tried to scramble to my feet, but Tandy was upon me in an instant. His fist clubbed down on the base of my skull, and I sprawled headlong upon the desiccated corpse. Quickly the pine top fell back into place, and Tandy's hammer drove home nail after nail.

Buried alive! I was being entombed with Leona's corpse, to die horribly, slowly smothering as I fought wildly for the last precious breath of air! Maddening terror swept through me at that ghastly prospect—but there was another horror even more poignant stabbing at my brain.

Betty would be this demented fiend's next victim! While I lay there struggling in my living tomb, she would be at Jubel Tandy's mercy—to face God only knew what indignities and torments!

"Betty! Betty!" Her name burst from my lips as my last grip on sanity slipped. "Betty! Betty!"

But the only answer was the hollow boom of earth clods thumping down on my coffin. Thuds that were becoming fainter as the grave filled and the earth piled up above me!

Tandy's demoniacal task was nearly completed. The endless silence of the grave was closing in upon me, fairly driving into my ears as I lay back, panting, on the desiccated corpse that shared my tomb.

Betty. . . . God have mercy upon her; deliver her from that fiend's hands or let her die quickly, I prayed fervently. Suddenly I tensed, every nerve sharpened, my breath caught between my teeth, as I strained my tingling ears.

There it was again. It was no figment of my hysterical imagination. That was Betty's scream—a thin, smothered scream that came from somewhere beneath me—*from the very bowels of the earth!*

CHAPTER THREE

Home of the Living-Dead

BETTY down there somewhere under the ground! Did that mean that Tandy had buried her also—that she was smothering to death in a living grave? Resolutely I clung to the last shreds of my sanity. To give way to madness now would mean the end; would mean the extinguishing of the last faint ray of hope that still flickered while I lived.

My body was quivering, my limbs twitching with the almost uncontrollable desire to thresh and writhe in raving madness, but I grimly held them in check. There must be a way out; Betty *could* not be left to die like this, I told myself—and methodically I began to explore my narrow tomb.

Breathing as slowly and as lightly as possible, I tested the sides, the top, the bottom and then the ends of my coffin. Nowhere did the boards yield. The top I knew was securely nailed down; the bottom hardly echoed the sound of my blows, so solidly was it imbedded in the dirt. The sides gave not a particle when I used all my strength against them, even though I jackknifed my body for leverage.

Panting and already struggling for breath, I sank back. It was utterly still—until my startled ears caught the soft rumble of settling dirt just beyond my head! Settling dirt. . . . That might mean nothing—and yet—

With newly fired hope I went to work on the head of the coffin, pressing against it, pounding it with my fists, twisting myself around so that I could reverse my

position and stamp my feet against it—and the boards started to give! Little by little, the nails were driven outward, until the boards were free! Frantically I drove my hands into the soil beyond—and a thrill of impossible hope electrified me.

The earth beyond those boards was loose—not close-packed as it should have been after three years of pressing against the coffin!

Using one of the boards as a shovel, I began to dig into it, drawing the loose soil back into the coffin as I tunneled. Straight ahead I bored—and the soil continued loose and readily yielding! I was going somewhere; perhaps only deeper into the bowels of the earth—but at least I was escaping from that fearful tomb-prison!

If only the air would hold out—that was my most immediate problem. I tried desperately to conserve it, but the oxygen was almost exhausted. My breath was already coming in gasps; my lungs were aching intolerably, and my head felt as if it must burst. But I *must* go on! Close to the soil I pressed my face and tried to draw the life-giving air from the earth itself—but I was becoming weaker and weaker. Now my hands were digging of their own volition their movements hardly directed by my reeling brain.

Twice I dropped flat in the narrow tunnel and thought I could not go on, but the memory of Betty's helplessness spurred me back to my task, got me up onto my knees and drove me ahead. Digging, tearing at the soft earth with my board, burrowing through it with my bare hands, flat on my belly and nosing my way like a human mole—I had no idea how long I labored before the earth in front of me suddenly dropped away and I crawled out into emptiness; out into free space where I could fill my aching lungs with great draughts of delicious air! Space where I could get off my knees and stand on my feet!

Minutes must have passed before I thought to light one of the matches in my coat pocket. The yellow flame played upon earthen walls all around me, walls supported at intervals by pillars and shafting like the tunnels of a mine. I was standing in a tunnel that extended in both directions and was joined at intervals by others from both sides.

NURSING my matches carefully, I started to explore and soon discovered that in one direction the tunnel terminated in a dead end. Retracing my steps, I followed it in the other direction. Now it was becoming wider and more solidly supported. With two other tunnels, it opened into a small, cavern-like pocket from which a fourth opening led upward.

The way to freedom! Eagerly I made my way up the incline. It seemed to end against a solid wall, but another of my precious matches revealed a lever at one side—a lever that silently moved a heavy block of stone inward when I drew it back. On my hands and knees I crawled through the opening and got to my feet in stygian darkness; blackness that was heavy with the musty staleness of a long-closed vault.

A burial vault—that was what it was. The match I held over my head revealed rows of marble slabs with the names and dates of generations of Fowlers upon them. The old Fowler burial vault—it served as an entrance to the amazing labyrinth of tunnels beneath the Fayette graveyard.

Quickly I turned to the entrance—and my heart sank. The ponderous door was of heavy iron, and it was locked; locked so securely that I could not hope to get it open. To try to attract attention by pounding on it was equally futile; I might hammer away for weeks, even months, before anyone would hear me. Behind that solid door I was trapped just as

effectively as if I were still in Leona's coffin.

There was no hope of escape here; no hope of getting help to go to Betty's rescue. . . . Not until that moment did I remember that her cries had seemed to come out of the earth itself. She was down there somewhere in those tunnels—and I would have to find her alone.

Swiftly I crept through the opening in the rear of the vault and hurried down the incline to the lower level. From there I tried another of the tunnels. This led off in the opposite direction from the one which I had first entered, and soon the shafting ceased as the passageway debouched into a natural cavern.

Now the going was more difficult. My matches revealed a maze of stalagmites and stalactites, with a web of paths lacing between them. Which one I should take there was no way of determining, but they all seemed to run in the same general direction. Choosing one which seemed fairly central, I pressed on as rapidly as I could.

How far I walked before I heard the first sounds I do not know; it seemed miles, seemed that the underground workings must go on forever into the bowels of the earth—but suddenly I brought up short when I caught the distant rumble of a man's voice.

Jubel Tandy's voice! The mad devil was down there somewhere in that fantastic catacombs—and with him must be Betty!

Anxiety drove me on frantically. Match after match I used prodigally, while I cautiously tried to cup the flame so that it would not betray my presence. And now the voice I had heard was becoming louder. I was getting closer and closer—until it seemed to be just ahead of me. Yes, it was—there, just ahead, I caught a flicker of light that seemed to come up from the floor!

Carefully I approached it, while Jubel

Tandy's voice boomed out in a strange litany.

"I am the resurrection and the life!" I heard him proclaim. "Wake up, my pretties—it is time to live again!"

On my hands and knees I crept close to that crevice through which the light was coming—and stared down at the most amazing scene I had ever beheld; stared down into a cavern room that might have been a chamber of hell itself!

That cavern was lower than the level on which I was standing. The crevice through which I peered seemed to be at one side, in an upper wall near the stalactite-hung ceiling. It was like a great hall, with benches ranged along its sides and with a dais-mounted throne at one end. On each of the benches sat the withered corpse of an old man, stiff and erect in moldering grave clothes—and beside each of these gaunt specters sat a nude young woman!

It was to the women that Tandy was speaking. From one to the other he went, bending over each to jab a hypodermic needle into her left side just beneath the breast—and in every case the effect was astounding. In little more than a minute those naked figures that had been sitting there as still and lifeless as their corpse partners stirred and came to life! One by one, he helped them from their benches!

"I am the resurrection—" droned from his lips as he bent over one of the nude bodies—and when he straightened up I almost yelled aloud in amazement.

That naked woman who was languorously coming back to life was Leona, my dead wife!

LEONA there in that cavern—but that was impossible; I had just been coffined with her desiccated corpse! Leona coming back to life—that must be madness! But my eyes could not be mistaken, could not be deceived in her face, in her

full, voluptuous figure. That *was* Leona—fawning upon Tandy, kneeling before him.

There were eight of the women whom I could see; young women in the full bloom of youth, all of them. Women who seemed to have been handpicked for their physical attractions. And as I stared at them my amazement became incredulity. I recognized nearly all of them—recognized girls who had been dead for as long as five years!

There, just beyond where Leona had sat, were the Clarke sisters, Eula and Jane, and beyond them Molly Hutton—the three girls who had been drowned two years ago in Long Lake. That dark-haired little beauty was Rhea Sutherland, old Stuart Sutherland's daughter, who had been stricken with a heart attack only last year. Clara Burden, who had been killed by a fall on Lawton Ridge. . . . They were all Fayette Valley girls—all girls who had died and been buried in the Fayette cemetery.

Dead girls, whose bodies should have been decomposed horrors, stepping back from the grave into life! Vainly my stunned brain tried to grasp what I beheld. For a moment I thought that I really must have died back there in the grave where Tandy had buried me. This must be a hell, a purgatory, some strange nether-world where anything was possible!

But where was Betty? What had this madman done to her?

Jubel Tandy answered that question for me even before my anxiously seeking eyes discovered her. Beside a stalagmite near the dais that dominated the room she crouched; sat listlessly on the floor until he came to her and lifted her up—lifted her to stand before his appraising eyes. Instead of cringing from that hellish gaze, she seemed to revel in it. Like those resurrected dead women, she turned adoring eyes on the white-bearded

fiend and sidled mincingly toward him.

What had the monstrous devil done to her? That was not my Betty—not the sweet, modest girl I adored! I was staring at Betty's incomparably beautiful body, but the inhuman devil had worked his diabolical magic upon her; he had murdered her soul!

Bitter curses came welling up to my lips—and were frozen there before I could utter them. Frozen there while my incredulous eyes goggled with amazement. Tandy had reached down beside where Betty had been sitting and had dragged another figure into view, had propped him up on the edge of the dais.

Another Jubel Tandy!

But this one was battered and disheveled. His hands were tied behind his back, his black robe was soiled and torn, and his whiskers were half-gone. What was left of them was tattered and stained with blood.

Tandy fastened his fingers in the blood-stained beard and pulled—and a handful tore loose; another and another. Savagely he ripped and tugged until the whiskers were all torn away, until the crown of snowy white hair was yanked from the half-bald head of—Emery Wilson!

Emery Wilson, my step-father! Masquerading as Jubel Tandy!

"Now we are ready to give you our attention, Wilson," Tandy snarled at him, as he loomed over his whimpering victim. "Your little murder scheme was very clever—but unfortunately I could not allow you to use me as a scapegoat."

WILSON'S quivering lips moved and attempted to frame a whimpering defense, but Tandy silenced him swiftly.

"I know all the details," he snapped. "You wanted to get rid of young Harrison because you were afraid that your wife would turn over a good part of his fortune to the lad, now that he was about to marry. You wanted to keep control of

that money yourself, and for that you were ready to commit murder. Murder that would be perfectly safe for you—because you schemed to throw the guilt upon me.

"Last night you impersonated me and went to Harrison's bedroom—after you were sure that the drug you had given him would make him harmless. You threatened him and the Crandall girl. You frightened them into starting back to New York, and then you rigged up a poison-gas generator in their car so that they would be overcome before they got out of the valley—just as you murdered my daughter! You made sure that the Crandall girl got a good look at you before you left her to take Harrison away and bury him alive in my daughter's grave.

"The story she would tell the authorities would bring them down on me and probably would uncover Harrison's body. He would be dead and permanently out of your way, and I would go to the gallows—leaving you completely safe and free to enjoy your wife's millions without interference for the rest of your life. Very excellent, Mr. Wilson—but you should not have staged your murder scheme here in the hills. In New York you might have succeeded—but here we mete out hillmen's justice!"

My step-father was the one who had buried me alive! That realization staggered me, but the abject terror that convulsed his face left no doubt of his guilt.

Instead of trying to defend himself, Wilson cowered there and slobbered whining pleas for mercy—this callous murderer who had condemned me to a ghastly death for fear that I might take out of his control part of the fortune that was mine!

"You are going to die, Emery Wilson," Tandy's voice cut into my racing thoughts. "Now up on your feet. March!"

Savagely he jerked the broken man

upright and delivered him to two of the girls. With torches taken from niches in the rocky walls, they led the way out of that cavern of the dead. Without an order from Tandy they seemed to know their roles, and each took her place silently in the bizarre procession.

All except Betty. She stood by uncertainly until Tandy came to her side and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

"You, too, my sweet one," I heard him say as he drew her close against him. "I hate to let anyone else have you, even for a little while—but I will bring you back and keep you here always. You will be my favorite and will wait for me up there on the high seat."

A few moments ago I had been thanking my lucky star for Jubel Tandy, thankful that he had frustrated Wilson's cold-blooded villainy and rescued Betty from the murderer—and now I realized that she had only leaped from the frying pan into the fire! Wilson had plotted only for my death, but this conscienceless devil planned to reduce her to the status of a living corpse; planned to keep her there underground, for God knows what devilish purposes were in his mad brain.

And Betty was going willingly into his arms. She did not know what she was doing! She did not realize that she was condemning herself to a living death in that unholy grave-world!

Blindly I hurled myself into that narrow crevice, desperately trying to squeeze my way through and leap down into the cavern below—but the opening was too narrow. The dazing smash of the hard stone against my forehead flung me back on all fours and restored my sanity. Barely in time I smothered the half-uttered shout that would have warned Tandy of my presence.

To take the fellow by surprise was my one gossamer hope—and even as I clung to that the naked procession vanished, the cavern was plunged into blackness.

Betty, alone and helpless, was on her way to a fate on which I dared not let my horrified mind dwell—and I was trapped, side-tracked in that endless subterranean labyrinth so that I could not even follow her. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

Gravelings' Revel

TIME ceased to have meaning for me as I wandered through that fantastic maze, running like a crazy man, stumbling and falling, crashing into low-reaching stalactites, creeping on my hands and knees, hardly conscious of my injuries or of the blood that flowed down my face as I sought frantically for an entrance to Tandy's gruesome throne-room. At last I stumbled into it and panted across it in the direction they had gone, but then my quest had hardly begun.

From there the underground workings ran on endlessly, a weird maze of catacombs that penetrated deeper and deeper into the stony structure of Lawton Ridge. I had despaired of ever reaching the end, had dully resigned myself to plodding on and on through that eternal silence, when suddenly the stillness was broken by a hoarse shriek of terror and a muffled groan, so distant that they sounded unreal, like echoing memories in my brain.

But they spurred me on to a burst of renewed speed that carried me into another artificial tunnel like the one at the other end of the caverns. This terminated abruptly at a closed door—a door from beyond which the babbling moan of Emery Wilson's voice came in a steady stream that was interrupted only by his agonized groans.

The ghastly threnody of his suffering made my blood run cold—but at least those tortured moans were not being wrenched from Betty's lips. I had reached her in time. Now, if only I could take

Tandy by surprise—could leap upon him before my advent was discovered—

With infinite caution I slowly drew the door outward—and peered in at what looked like a temple of the dead; a low-ceilinged, stone-walled room that was lit by brackets of funeral candles. In the center stood a low bier on which Emery Wilson lay spread-eagled. Around him was gathered as weird a company as man could conceive—those revenant women in the arms of ghastly, black-robed, black-hooded figures.

One look at those grisly death-masks was sufficient to strike gelid horror into my soul—and yet those women accepted their caresses with no evidence of revulsion! Ghastly corpses that seemed to have stepped fresh from their tombs—for now I saw that the room was lined on two sides with narrow doorways that must lead to individual burial vaults. . . .

What sort of monster was this Tandy that he could bring the dead back to life? What sort of unholy diablerie did he exercise over these gravelings that they could desert their tombs at his will?

My blood ran cold as I saw their bony, purple-blotched hands upon Betty—as I saw her smile into their repulsive caricatures of faces; but before I could fling the door wide and leap recklessly into their midst Tandy's voice cut through Wilson's delirious babble.

"We have had enough of this," he decreed. "This man has committed murder, and for that, his life is forfeit. It is time that he should pay the penalty."

He waved his arm toward the bier—and with that gesture a veritable hell broke loose. With that gesture those creatures were transformed into savage beasts. Like hungry animals they swarmed over the bier, ripping and tearing at the bound man, slashing at him with nails and teeth—while their corpse companions stood back and watched with gleaming eyes and hideously leering faces.

Wilson's moans rose to screams in a livid crescendo of excruciating agony. His clothing was ripped from him in shreds, and then his living flesh was stripped from his bones in great, bleeding chunks. In a few moments those white bodies were crimson, splashed from head to foot with running blood. Like red demons they fought and tore at him—while their graveling audience urged them on to more horrible excesses.

All except Betty. She alone hung back, despite the efforts of the corpse-men to force her up to the bloody bier. Her face was ashen, and I could see the nausea in her staring eyes.

NOW was the time to spring to her rescue, I told myself; but caution held me back. Once I plunged into that bloody shambles I would be one against a dozen, one unarmed man against a dozen bloodthirsty devils who would gleefully welcome another victim. I would be overwhelmed, and with my capture Betty's doom would be irrevocably sealed.

No, I must wait. Somehow I must take them by surprise, must reach her and get her away from them before they had a chance to seize me. Inch by inch I drew the door wider, safe from discovery now for every eye was turned on Jubel Tandy.

He had grasped Betty and was trying to force her up to the bier. Her refusal whetted his anger to seething rage. Snapping a sharp command, he drove those naked savages away from their prey, left the twitching horror that was Emery Wilson writhing and palpitating on the blood-spattered bier—and forced a long, keen-bladed knife into Betty's hand.

"Now it is your turn," he ordered as he shoved her forward. "He has suffered sufficiently. Now you shall administer the *coup de grace*—through the heart!"

"No—oh, no!" I heard Betty moan, as she tried to draw back; but Tandy had anticipated that.

He had leaped to one side and snatched up a heavy blacksnake whip. Around his head it whirled, whistled through the air—and wrapped itself around Betty's soft body. Again and again it cut through the air, banding her body with bloody welts. Again and again, while she cowered in helpless terror—and while Jubel Tandy walked closer and closer to her, his blazing eyes gripping hers and holding them fast.

"Now is the time—through the heart!" he repeated, his voice lashing out like the snap of the whip in that deathly silent room—and Betty strode forward to obey.

Like an automaton she stepped toward the ghastly bier—to commit murder and damn herself for all time. But that was more than I could stand. Throwing caution to the wind, I leaped through the doorway.

"No, Betty—no!" I shouted. "Don't let them—"

But that was as far as I got. My rush was checked almost before it started, checked by a barrier that came up out of the floor and rose almost knee-high the moment the door opened. It threw me headlong, sprawled me at full length on the floor—and before I could scramble to my feet four of the gravelings were upon me, pinning me down so that I could scarcely move a muscle.

In another moment they were swarming around me, those ghastly-faced living dead men and their bloody consorts—and through their midst strode the patriarchal figure of Jubel Tandy, to stand looking down at me with eyes that were alight with hellish satisfaction.

"Wesley Harrison," he mouthed my name with relish. "So you have attained resurrection without my aid. But you are dead; you were buried alive. A man has paid the penalty for killing you, so it is only fitting that you take his place to atone for the mistake."

Swift orders crackled from his lips, and I was dragged upright, was stripped to the waist. Emery Wilson's mangled body was taken from the bier and callotishly dumped on the floor, and I was stretched out on the bloody stone surface, my ankles and wrists securely-lashed so that I was helplessly spread-eagled.

Tandy walked to where Betty stood like one in a trance and lifted her face so that her eyes stared straight into his.

"This shall be your task—yours alone," his sonorous voice filled the suddenly quiet room. "You will execute our judgment—and you will do it slowly so that he suffers as the one who died for him was made to suffer. Slowly and carefully."

THE devil was hypnotizing her, was bending her to his fiendish will—and Betty was succumbing! I read the dull expression in her half-glazed eyes, saw her turn and start toward me like an automaton. Without the slightest change of expression she paused beside the bier, and her hand raised the gleaming knife.

"Betty—listen to me, Betty!" I tried my utmost to break down the wall he had erected around her consciousness. "Don't do it, darling! Look down at me—I am Wesley. Betty—"

But she did not seem to hear me. Her face was blank. The knife came down, to stab into my shoulder like a white-hot spear. Doggedly I smothered the groan that gurgled in my throat—and then that wicked blade came down again and sank into my arm. I could feel the warm blood pouring out of my wounds; I knew that my voice was desperately babbling pleas, frantically trying to snap the spell that held her powerless—but my eyes were fixed steadily on that blood-smearred blade.

It was coming down again, and this time it bit into my right wrist—but before it whipped clear it had cut through the

rope that held me! A tug would free that arm, but I held it there rigidly in position while a groan of agony issued from my tightly clenched lips. Unbelievably I stared into the expressionless face—but now there could be no doubt of Betty's intention.

The knife came down again with lightning speed and whipped across the rope that held my right wrist, flashed downward to my ankle. . . .

It had happened so swiftly that for an instant the onlookers did not seem to realize what had happened. All except one of them—but her eyes were more alert than the rest, her interest in my suffering more keen. Out of the arms of the corpse-man who held her, Leona sprang—to hurl herself like a leaping tigress at Betty!

Swept off her feet by that sudden onslaught, Betty was forced back over the bloody bier on which I lay. Like a mad-dened thing, with round, staring eyes and slaving lips, Leona was upon her, clawing and tearing, snatching purposely at her throat. Even with the knife, Betty had all she could do to defend herself and regain her footing.

Then began a battle that held those blood-thirsty fiends spellbound, a battle such as they had never seen. Love was in that battle, and hate as well—love that fought with utter desperation to free me, and hate that flung forth recklessly, disregarding the keen blade of the knife in berserk determination to thwart my release.

Every eye was riveted on that primeval struggle—and for the moment I was ignored. That moment was all I needed, that moment which Betty was striving so desperately to prolong for me. A preliminary tug assured me that my wrists were free. A few twists of my right leg freed that ankle. Then I tensed every muscle, gathered every ounce of strength that was in me—and suddenly heaved myself upright on the stone bier.

Feverishly my fingers went to work on the knots that still held my left ankle imprisoned. Split-seconds counted now. The blood-maddened women were swarming about me before I was able to free myself; their fingers were tearing at me, ripping my face, scoring my arms and back. One after the other I hurled them back with punches and wild sweeps of my arm, but my body was covered with blood and my face felt as if it had been through a meat-chopper.

And Betty. . . . Her body was blood-smearred and covered with livid scratches. Leona's fingers were fastened in her throat, were bending her backward—just as the knife-point plunged deep into her bosom. . . .

For an instant stunned silence greeted the end of the battle. Then, with yells of rage, the women turned on Betty. But in that moment I had freed myself. Leaping down from the bier, I thrust Betty behind me and bent over Leona's dead body. It would serve as a shield—but no, there was no more time for a shield; they were almost upon us, coming on in a rush that would not be denied.

Where I found that sudden surge of strength, I do not know. Suddenly I swept the dead body up from the floor and lifted it over my head, to hurl it straight into their slaving faces. In the same instant I grabbed Betty and held her close to me as I leaped clear of the bier and flung myself at Jubel Tandy in a running dive.

I caught the old devil just as he was about to reach a door at the farther end of the room; caught him and brought him down in a bundle of threshing arms and legs. From somewhere he had gotten hold of a knife. I felt it bite into my shoulder, felt it send searing agony stabbing into my back—but I did not even try to wrench it from his hand.

My fingers closed around his throat

and I banged his head down upon the stone floor, beat a tattoo against it with his skull.

Those tactics were effective—amazingly so. Tandy's eyes bugged out of his head and he gasped for air. He tried desperately to wrench himself free—and succeeded only in tearing half of his white beard from his face!

For the second time that night I gaped incredulously as the hairy countenance of Jubel Tandy disintegrated—and revealed the fear-stricken face of Duncan Fowler, our caretaker! Fowler, his blue eyes gleaming with utter madness as terror unseated the last of his reason in a hoarse scream.

"Let me go, Wesley!" he pleaded. "Let me go! Don't let them at me! They'll kill me, Wesley! Come with me—you and Betty. There is still time to get away from them. Up this stairs, Wesley—there is a fuse-box at the top. I have the key here. We'll pull the levers in that box and they will be trapped down there. There is still time—"

But there wasn't time. The gravelings were closing in on him from all sides. With knives and clubs they charged us, and I had all I could do to protect Betty with the knife I had snatched from her hand, while she reached the door for which Fowler had been heading and pulled it open. Fowler went down under their rush. I saw clubs beating down on his skull, saw knives stabbing into his flesh—and then I was through the door after Betty and sprinting up the stairs ahead of us.

Those stairs were several floors deep, and before we had reached the top the human wolf-pack behind us was close at our heels. They were yelling to one another, yelling warnings that we must not escape, and they were less than a flight below us when I dragged Betty through the doorway at the top—and saw her sink

to the floor in a dead faint of exhaustion and terror.

To attempt to carry her was hopeless; just as hopeless as trying to stand off our blood-thirsty pursuers.

And then I remembered the key I had snatched from Fowler's pocket—the key that I still clutched in my hand. I jabbed it into the lock of the fuse-box, yanked open the door, pulled every lever in sight—and was flung half-way across the room as the very earth beneath me seemed to disintegrate in a series of thunderous explosions.

I must have banged my head against something as I toppled backward. All I can remember is that thunderous roar filling my ears—and then a heavy darkness, deep and impenetrable, swept over me. . . .

BETTY was kneeling beside me and bathing my bloody face with wet cloths when I came back to my senses. We were in a room of what proved to be the hunting clubhouse on the far side of Lawton Ridge, and we were alone. The clubhouse was deserted—and it was never more to know the tread of a member's foot. Its entire roster lay entombed under tons of wreckage far below the level of its basement.

In the next few weeks I learned a great deal about that club—and about Duncan Fowler.

The club property was the last of his family's once extensive holdings that he still owned, and with it he was desperately attempting to rebuild his fortune. The members were no huntsmen; they were wealthy degenerates who paid him lavishly for the unholy entertainment their wilderness clubhouse had once provided.

But money was not Duncan Fowler's only desire. Embittered by the loss of his family fortune and prestige, he dreamed

of the day when he would again be able to lord it over his neighbors. One by one the old-timers were slipping away before he could realize that ambition—and so he lorded it over them in death. Burrowing under the Fayette cemetery, he took the corpses of the old men from their graves and propped them up in his private throne-room—and then added to his audience by virtually kidnaping the most attractive girls that could be found in the entire valley.

By trapping them in faked accidents and innoculating them with a drug that simulated death, he insured their burial—and then stole their bodies from the graves and revived them, to keep them drugged prisoners in his underground chamber.

“And if you had not escaped from your

coffin, I would be sitting there with them now,” Betty whispered, when the full story of his madness was revealed. “I can’t understand how you were able to do that.”

But I can.

When Fowler divined Emery Wilson’s intention of burying me alive in my wife’s grave, he had to work fast. Leona’s body was not in that coffin, and when it was opened that fact would be discovered. To avoid such a possibility, he hastily reopened the narrow tunnel by which he had originally robbed the grave and placed a withered mummy in the coffin. In his haste he was not able to pack the earth back into the tunnel as tightly as it had been—and to that lucky circumstance Betty and I owe the fact that we are alive and happy today.

THE END